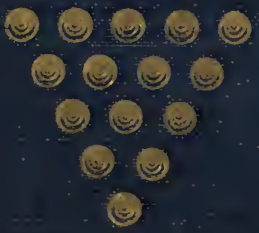
# WILD LIFE AT THE LAND'S END

J. C. TREGARTHEN.



WILLIAM GEORGE'S SONS LTD.
BRISTOL

# WILD LIFE AT THE LAND'S END

Andrew Stevens

# WILD LIFE AT THE LAND'S END

OBSERVATIONS OF THE HABITS AND HAUNTS OF THE FOX, BADGER, OTTER SEAL, HARE, AND OF THEIR PURSUERS IN CORNWALL

BY J. C. TREGARTHEN

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET
1904

# PREFACE

THE sports described have led me to some of the wildest and weirdest spots of West Cornwall. There are few tracts in England more rugged than the northern part of the peninsula that lies between the Land's End and St Ives. It is possible to travel across the moors from Crobben Hill to Chapel Cairn Brea without setting foot on cultivated ground. It is a boulder-strewn waste, void of trees, where the grey of the granite mingles in spring and autumn with the gold of the gorse that, with heather and bracken, clothes the undulating surface.

To the lover of nature the wild aspect of these breezy uplands is not without its charms; but the glory of the promontory is the ocean in which it is set. The great rampart of cliffs that holds back the Atlantic is broken here and there by beaches of white sand or minute shells, or by coves into which fall the trout-streams that rise in the granite hills above. Along the tangled valleys they water,

many an interesting picture arrests the eye; but whether it be a holy well, an old mill, a grove, a rustic bridge or fishing-hamlet, all is in tender miniature, like the streams themselves or the modest hills where they bubble to the light.

In these valleys bird-life is rich. On a spit of sand you may chance on the footprints of an otter, whose harbour by day is some rocky holt along the cliffs; where the blackthorns are densest you may come across a badger's earth, and see the paths he has trodden in going to and fro. This creature is very plentiful—as plentiful indeed as the hare is scarce. Generally he shares the same earth with the fox. On the north coast the seal shows no sign of decrease; thanks to its tireless vigilance, and the inaccessible caves it frequents.

These surviving mammals add to the attractions of a coast and countryside over which broods the silence of a mysterious past. The fascination which these creatures have for me dates from boyhood, when I once caught a glimpse of a badger stealing over a cairn in the grey of early dawn; and the Earthstopper, wandering with dog and lantern over the moors, presents a picture that has often appealed to me.

If the descriptions, however crude, serve to

awaken old associations in some readers, or to excite the interest of those who have never visited the sunny "land of the three shores"; above all, if the sketch of the Earthstopper helps to preserve the memory of a master of his craft, my hopes will be fully realised.

ROSMORRAN, SIDCUP.

# CONTENTS


| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | THE EARTHSTOPPER UNDER THE STARS | 1 |
| II. | THE FOX-HUNT | 14 |
| III. | FOX-HUNTING, AS IT WAS IN THE DAYS OF QUEEN BESS, quoted from *Carew's Survey of Cornwall*, 1565 | 34 |
| IV. | THE OTTER—TRACKING THE WILY VARMINT | 36 |
| V. | THE OTTER, *continued* — THE EARTHSTOPPER'S VIGIL | 48 |
| VI. | THE OTTER, *continued*—THE OTTER AT THE LAKE | 64 |
| VII. | THE OTTER, *continued*—THE HUNT | 71 |
| VIII. | THE WHITE BADGER OF CAIRN KENIDZHEK—THE EARTHSTOPPER IN DOUBT | 85 |
| IX. | THE WHITE BADGER OF CAIRN KENIDZHEK, *continued*—THE EARTHSTOPPER ANGRY | 100 |
| X. | THE WHITE BADGER OF CAIRN KENIDZHEK, *continued*—THE BADGER'S CAPTURE AND ESCAPE | 112 |
| XI. | THE HARE—LIFE STORY OF THE JACK OF BARTINNEY | 130 |

| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| XII. | THE HARE, *continued*—DIGORY STROUT AND FARMER PENDRE . . . . . | 145 |
| XIII. | THE HARE, *continued*—THE COURSE . . . | 152 |
| XIV. | A MIDNIGHT VISIT TO THE SEAL-CAVES . . | 167 |
| XV. | REMINISCENCES OF BOYHOOD'S DAYS . . . | 186 |
| XVI. | BASS FISHING AT THE LAND'S END . . . | 206 |
| XVII. | NED'S TALE OF THE BIRDS . . . . | 221 |
| | GLOSSARY . . . . . | 235 |

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS


ANDREW THE EARTHSTOPPER (*Photogravure*). (*From a photograph by Richards, Penzance*) . . *Frontispiece*

THE EARTHSTOPPER ON TRENGWAINTON CAIRN. (*From a photograph by Richards, Penzance*) . *Face page* 12

THE FOX. (*From a photograph by C. Reid*) . . „ 26

FOX-CUBS. (*From a photograph by C. Reid*) . . „ 34

TOL PEDN PENWITH. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 38

LAMORNA MILL. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 44

LAMORNA, SHOWING CAIRN DHU HEADLAND. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) „ 52

THE OTTER. (*From a photograph by Quatremaine, Stratford-on-Avon*) . . . . . „ 64

A HAUNT OF THE OTTER. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 82

CAIRN KENIDZHEK. (*From a photograph by Gibson & Sons, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 88

THE BADGER. (*From a photograph by C. Reid*) . „ 110

ST BURYAN CHURCH. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . „ 130

STONE CIRCLE AT BOSCAWEN-UN. (*From a photograph by Gibson & Sons, Penzance*) . . *Face page* 138

SANCREED CHURCHTOWN. (*From a photograph by Gibson & Sons, Penzance*) . . . . „ 150

CHAPEL ST UNY WELL. (*From a photograph by Gibson & Sons, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 156

ZENNOR CHURCHTOWN. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 166

A STREET AT ST IVES. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 168

HELL'S BAY. (*From a photograph by W. Cooper, St Ives*) . . . . . „ 178

NEST OF SEAGULL. (*From a photograph by Gibson & Sons, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 190

ST MICHAEL'S MOUNT. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 194

SENNEN COVE. (*From a photograph by Gibson & Sons, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 206

PORTHGWARRA. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 210

A HAUNT OF THE RAZOR-BILL. (*From a photograph by Gibson & Sons, Penzance*) . . „ 220

THE HOME OF THE CORMORANT. (*From a photograph by Gibson & Sons, Penzance*) . . „ 226

THE LAND'S END. (*From a photograph by R. H. Preston, Penzance*) . . . . . „ 232

# WILD LIFE AT THE LAND'S END

## CHAPTER I

### THE EARTHSTOPPER UNDER THE STARS

It was an hour after midnight when the Earthstopper of the Penwith Hunt left his cottage on the outskirts of Madron. He carried a lantern and a rough terrier followed at his heels. His track led, by lanes in the heather, over a cairn to the furze-clad downs overlooking the lake.

To the West, sombre hills rose against the jewelled vault where the stars in the depths of the frosty sky kept watch over the slumbering earth. Half-way over the downs, beneath the roots of a stunted pine, was a fox-earth. The old man knelt down and stopped it with faggots of furze. The light of the lantern lit up his strong and kindly face, and fell on the heap of sandy soil at the mouth of the earth.

Leaving the downs he turned towards Penhale, skirting the marshy ground in the trough of the hills, and climbing a steep rise made for a crag—playground of many litters—beneath which lay the next earth. Furze bushes screened the entrance and hung like a pall on the slope. The wind wuthered round the rocks and stirred the rushes in the fen below; but the Earthstopper gave no heed to these whisperings of the night, and paused but for an instant, as he bent over his work, to listen to the bark of a fox in the pitchy darkness beyond. His way now lay across a bleak waste. Rude monuments of a grey past dot its surface and a solitary cottage overlooks its desolation. No path led along the line he was taking: cromlech and monolith in ghostly outline guided his steps.

The Earthstopper's progress was slow, for the surface was rough and the bogs treacherous, but yet he was getting nearer and nearer to Cairn Galver, which rose like a cliff from the moor, its crest silhouetted against the deep sapphire of the heavens.

"Good God, what's thet?" said he, as a fiendish scream awoke the echoes of the rugged hills. "Don't sound like et, but et must a' come from thet cottage over theere. Iss sure, theere's a light

in the winder. Semmen to me 'tes uncommon like murder."

He had taken but a few stumbling steps along a track into which he had turned, ere the faint thud of hoofs fell on his ear. More and more distinct through the night came the sound, broken at times by a shout. A rocky hollow lay in front of him; down which rider and horse came at a furious pace, splashing the water as they dashed through the stream below. Breasting the rise at the same frantic speed they were over the brow and almost upon the Earthstopper before he was aware, and scarcely had he jumped aside when they galloped past him.

Merest glimpse though he got of the man, he recognised him, for his face was turned towards the light as it lay over the horse's neck. It was Jago the miner.

"Good Lor', what's the maanin' of et? Why don't eh stop the hoss?"

"Don't take me for a Jack-o-Lantern, s'pose?"

Some distance along the stony track the clatter of the hoofs ceased. The Earthstopper ran towards the spot.

"Where are ee, why don't ee spaake?"

"Heere, An'rew, quick as you can."

A minute later the Earthstopper, with one hand

resting on the mane of the heaving horse, was looking up at the miner's blanched face.

"What's the matter wi' ee, Jago? you looked skeared."

"Steve es killed by a faal o' ground. We brought un hoam an hour agone. Et wor moore nor Mawther could stand. Her rason's clane gone."

"Can I help ee?"

"No thank ee, An'rew."

In breathless haste he spoke, and with a shout he was gone, his path picked out in sparks, as the good horse without bridle or rein covered the ground to the slumbering village.

Andrew stood peering through the night till the tiny fires died away and the beat of the hoofs struck faint as the footfall of a child.

This incident had unnerved the lonely Earthstopper.

More than once as he ascended the Galver he turned his head, though without staying his steps, to see that it was but the terrier that followed him. Panting from the hurried climb he rested on a boulder of the cairn and set the lantern down on the turf at his feet. The bitch nestled between her master and the flickering flame.

The stars shone in all their splendour, but it was

the glow-worm light that crept through the gloom below which riveted the Earthstopper's gaze.

"Well, Vennie me beety, theere's death and worse nor death in thet theere cottage, and et's shook me tar'ble, but our night's work must be got through somehow or theer'll be no spoart to-day. With this wind a fox es moast sure to make for Zonnor Cliffs.

"Come, me dear, 'tes cold up heere, two mile waan't see us to cliff, and thee must furst run through the radgell on the Little Galver."

So, taking up the lantern, he went to the clitter of rocks and sent the bitch in. He could follow her by the patter of her feet as she ran through the cavernous hollows. On coming out at the far end of the rocks she awaited her master and, when he came up, took her place at his heels. Before leaving the high ground the Earthstopper stood listening for a few moments with his face towards Madron, whither Jago had ridden to summon the doctor. Hearing nothing, he made his way down the slope of the cairn to the rugged waste that stretches away to the Northern coast.

Their work was now done till they reached the cliffs. He seldom spoke to his dog in going from one earth to another, and to-night he had enough to think about.

Thirty years of wandering under the stars had matured the philosopher within him.

"Mine's a wisht kind of a life, mine es; but so long as health and strength do laast 'tes grand to traapse the moors and circumvent the varmints. I know evra inch o' thes eere country, evra patch o' fuzze, and evra pile o' rocks, and the stars be moore to me nor to moast folks. The eearth es beetiful, 'tes a pity to laave et, and when we do wheere do we go to? The ways o' the birds, the enstincts of evra wild crittur, the min'rals I've blasted in the bal under the saa, the dimants up theere, tell me plain enuf theere's a Maister-hand behind et all. All of ee say theere's a God, but why are ee quiate as the grave about the Better Land?"

The distant stars glittered in the silent vault, the wind was heedless as the moor it swept, and there was no answer in the far-off mystic murmur of the sea.

His sinewy strides soon brought him to the edge of the cliff. Two hundred feet below, the Atlantic lashed the rocks and raged in the caverns.

"Well, auld Ocean, I can hear ee ef I caan't see ee. Hope theest heaved up no dead thes tide. Lor', how the gools do scraame, to be sure! but 'tes moosic and 'tes company to thet scraach on the

moor"; and he shuddered at the thought. Half trusting to the tussocks of coarse grass but with muscles all alert he clambered down the steep zigzag his own feet had traced, towards the adit of Wheal Stanny situate near the line of the foam. Shrinking from the seething waters below he crept along a narrow ledge and with scanty foothold reached the mouth of the adit, where he brushed the sweat and salt spray from his face.

Then on hands and knees, his finger-marks effacing the footprints of marauding fox, he entered the narrowing chasm and stopped the hole as best he could, with pieces of quartz.

Drippings from the moist roof—retreat of trembling fern—blurred the lantern's light and dimmed the sparkle of the crystals.

Leaving the cliffs he made for the uplands, for a few earths lay in the gullies that seamed them, and here and there a disused mine-work offered a safe retreat to fox and badger. Carefully the Earth-stopper picked his way in the murky hollows, the lantern's light awaking the frown of the granite and falling bright on the gold of the bracken that fringed the treacherous shaft. On the weird countryside above, the array of boulders loomed like phantoms in the sombre heather.

Threading in and out among them as he rose and sank with the undulating surface, the Earthstopper might have been a spy stealing from camp to camp of spectral hosts bivouacking on the dusky slopes.

On the furthest ridge he stood peering into the darkness that shrouded a moor over which he must pass. The level expanse might have seemed to invite him as smooth water invites a swimmer wearied by the waves, but superstitious fear held him there irresolute. For an eerie legend clung to the heart of the moor. Crofters would draw closely round their bright furze-fires as they listened to the harrowing tale. Little wonder that the old man paused in his forward path, for the last earth on his round was near a cairn that partly screened a haunted pool, and the moor compassed it round.

Seeing a light—it was a mere glimmer—in a lone homestead on the low ground between him and the cliff, he resolved to make his way down to it and await the dawn. With difficulty, for the hillside was covered with furze, he reached the byre where a candle burned on the ledge inside a small window. Peeping through a cob-webbed pane, he was able to recognise the farmhand at work inside, though the man's back was turned towards him.

Unfortunately for the labourer, the noise made by the turnip-chopper he was working drowned the sound of the approaching footsteps, and Andrew's voice at the half-open door was the first intimation he had of the Earthstopper's presence.

"Mornin', 'Gellas."

"Lor', you ded maake me joomp, An'rew. . . . Wisht news about Steve Jago, edna?"

"Bra' an wisht. I do hear the poor auld woman's gone clane out of her mind. 'Tes foolish like, but her scraachin's thet unnarved me, I'm moast afeered to go and stop thet theere eearth touchin' Deadman."

"Laave un be, noathin' eearthly waan't go a-nighst un for thes day. A sinkin' fox would raither die in th' open nor maake for un. They do say when any man or woman o' thes heere parish, and 'tes a bra' big wan too, do die a vilent death like as ow" . . .

Andrew's upraised palm had checked him.

"Then thee dost know all 'bout un?"

"Iss, iss, worse luck, I've heerd about the wisht auld thing."

"Look here, An'rew," said Tregellas under his breath as he drew close to him, "I don't knaw how fur may be fancy like, for I'd bin thinkin'

'bout un, but semmen to me I heerd a scraach from thet quarter about an hour agone and theere—theere edn any housen to moore nor a mile" . . .

Andrew had heard more than enough and, before Tregellas could add another word, he hurried through the open doorway, crossed the brook that ran through the mowhay, and was soon breasting the rugged hill leading to the Deadman.

On the edge of the moor he paused to listen. From out the distance came the cry of some bird : the sea called faintly behind him. He looked towards the East. There was no sign of dawn.

"I'll faace un, come what may. Be quiate, stop thet theere whinin' will ee."

Then he trimmed the wick of the lantern, pulled his cap well on to his ears and, stepping from tuft to tuft of the silent heather, set out across the moor. He made straight for the cairn and with trembling hands stopped the earth ; but though he heard the wind sighing in the reeds he feared to turn his eyes towards the tarn.

Hurrying from the eerie spot he set out on his way homewards, staying his steps a moment near a pool to look at the clean-cut footprints of a fox. Water was oozing into them, for the ground was very marshy. And so he came to the gaunt ruin

of Ding Dong Mine which serves as a mark to the long-line fishermen of Mount's Bay. Only the walls and end timbers of the lofty roof are left for the gales to whistle through; and in the grey dawn a kestrel perched on the gable was preening its feathers. From the mine-burrows hard by, the wayfarer overlooks headland and harbour, the surf round St Michael's base and the waters of the sail-flecked bay.

Well might the Earthstopper, whose soul, like that of many a toiler, was far above his lowly work, dwell on the awakening beauty of land and sea below him.

The stars had paled their fires and crimson streaks in the throbbing east heralded the sun. Lighting first the hungry Manacles the gladdening orb rose over the serpentine cliffs of Lizard, bathing with its rays the sea and circling hills, and touching with gold the battlements of the castle and the pinnacles of the westward churches.

"No wonder thet furriners do bow their knees on desert sands and wusshup ee. Don't knaw when I've seed ee lookin' so beetiful missel." The hawk, now hovering over its prey, disturbed his simple reverie. "Come, me dear"—but Vennie had slipped away—"'tes nigh breakfust time, and the cheeld will be 'spectin' us." So down the hill

he hurried, the smoke from his own hearth cheering him and turning his thoughts to his peaceful home. He pictured the little room neat and clean, the breakfast-table with his chair drawn up to it, the sanded floor and the kettle on the brandis amidst the glowing embers. He forgot his fatigue; his steps were lightened as he thought of the child who looked after his few comforts and always welcomed his home-coming. At a turn in the track by some stormbent hawthorns he came suddenly upon her, come out to meet him. What a change comes over the old man's face at the sight of her! How his eyes brighten as she runs to greet him!

"I knawed thee couldna be fur away, granfer, for Vennie's been home these ten minits or moore."

He looked behind him, but the bitch was gone.

"Ah, I can guess what's drawed her theere."

The girl took the lantern from his cramped hand and, side by side, her arm linked with his, they made their way towards the cottage. Two minutes later the clatter of hoofs behind them made her look round. "Someone's comin' down the Forest Cairn, granfer."

"Iss, me dear, 'tes Dobbin's step thee canst hear. Now run home along whilst I have a word with the doctor."

The Earthstopper on Trengwainton Cairn.

[*Face page* 12.

The girl was barely a stone's throw away when the doctor cantered up to where the Earthstopper awaited him.

"Mornin', Andrew, another touch of rheumatism?"

"No, sir, never felt better in my life; no, tedn thet: I wanted to ask ee about Mrs Jago."

"You've heard about it?"

The Earthstopper nodded assent.

"It's all over with the poor woman, Andrew."

. . . "May be 'tes best so, sir."

"Yes, best so," repeated the doctor, as he rode away.

Andrew overtook his grandchild near the cottage, and was following her through the open door, getting a glimpse of Vennie and her puppies on the badger skin before the turf fire, when the bells rang out a joyous peal as if to remind him of the festive day. He turned and listened: the grey tower rose above the patched roofs of the cottages, the notes struck clear through the crisp air.

A smile rose to the weather-beaten face, the lips moved, and cheerily came the words:

"Ring out your best, auld bells, for 'tes Maddern Feasten Monday."

## CHAPTER II

### THE FOX-HUNT

Beyond the memory of Dick Hal, who remembered the home-bringing of two wounded "Church-Town" men after Waterloo, the hounds had met on Feast Days at the Castle. The grounds with their stately terraces and relics of feudal dignity were thrown open for the meet, the protests of old Jenny at the park gate notwithstanding.

Long before the hour appointed a little crowd assembled outside the lodge. Fishermen in blue guernseys were there, miners in their workaday clothes, and a strong force of villagers. It is noteworthy what a motley crowd, from squire to plough-boy, from vigorous youth to crippled old age, will congregate to witness a day's fox-hunting.

And surely the sight of twenty couple of hounds drawing a patch of gorse in an open and wild country, the suspense that follows the first whimper,

the find, the thrilling tally-ho, and the hurry and scurry of the field, is a spectacle as pleasant as it is exhilarating.

Looking out of an upper window of one of the little towers that flanked the gateway was old Jenny Trewheela, blind of one eye, whose sharp tongue was more effective than a fifteen-pounder in defence of her charge. Villagers averred that "her main suction ware vinegar," and a candid friend had told her so. As the hour approached the crowd began to press too close to the lodge to please her vigilant eye. "Werta shovin' to? Thee shussen wan of ee còme inside the gates till th' 'ounds 'a gone through. They be Sir Bevil's orders."

"Sober, mawther," said a keen-eyed poacher, "we be all afeeard of ee, and thee dost knaw it; but hows'ever we doan't want none o' your winegar. Custna haand round a bit o' crowse and a drop o' somethin' to drink? 'Tes a dry East wind and bra' an cold."

"Sauce and imprence! I do knaw thee and the crooked ways of ee, though thee dost skulk behind a honest man," and with that she banged-to the window.

A few minutes before the village clock chimed the hour, the huntsman, hounds, and whippers-in

passed through the gate and along the approach to the inner court, and drew up on the far side of the keep near the old culverin. By ones and twos, gentlemen from the country round, tenant farmers and crofters, rode up to the Castle.

This venerable building in the hundred of Penwith in the parish of Madron had been the seat of the Tresillians from the time of Henry the Second. The Castle is quaintly described in an old survey of Cornwall as "very ancient, strong and fayre and appurtenanced with the necessaries of wood, water, parkes, moors, with the devotion of a rich-furnished chapelle and charitie of almshouses."

The terrace is still haunted by the squire who fell on the memorable day when the place was held for the King against the Roundheads. The painting in the hall shows the assault on the outer wall, where a lurid glare lights up helm and pike at the narrow breach; for above battlement and turret, clearly outlined, leap tongues of fire from the beacon on the Cairn.

Dents in the granite walls still mark where the cannon-balls struck the building; and it was at that time — I know there are some who dispute the date—that one of the quarterings of the family arms above the entrance was effaced.

Sir Bevil and Lady Tresillian, who were standing on the steps below, gave their guests a hearty welcome. Breakfast was laid in the wainscotted hall, bright with log fires.

Cornish worthies in their gold frames wink at the merry gathering round the table.

Sir Bevil, despite his grey hairs, looks young for his sixty years. Life's work is stamped on his high-bred features. He looks every inch a soldier. The tanned face and parched skin suggest frontier fighting: the scar on the brow confirms it.

Facing the mullioned window, on Sir Bevil's right is Squire Tremenheere of Lanover, the hardest rider of the hunt; next him is the Major of the C.C. battery, whose neighbour is the popular member for the Land's End Division; next him is a ship-owner whose vessels are on every sea; the veteran with silvery hair and twinkling eyes has been purser of a tin-mine for nearly half a century; the man with the long black beard is the village doctor, and a kind friend to the poor; below him sit half a score farmers, and a good time they are having.

"This be a good drop o' zider," says the weather-beaten crofter who sits facing a portrait of Sir Richard Grenville. "Gos't home," said the eldest

tenant on the estate, "Tedden no zider: but caal 'en what you like, 'tes a drop of the raal auld stingo.'

The aristocratic old gentleman, tête-à-tête with Lady Elizabeth, is Sir Lopes Carminowe, who knows every gate, gap and fox-earth in Penwith. Need it be said that the little wizened-face man with laughing eyes, whose wit is as dry as the champagne, is the legal adviser of those whom he is tickling with forensic anecdotes? The parson is the recipient of much chaff and banter; but with eyes sparkling under his shaggy brows and in the best of humour he is cutting about him with his sharp-edged tongue to the discomfiture of his assailants. Says Sir Bevil, "The parson reminds me of the Cavalier in the picture who has brought down half a dozen of the enemy and is looking round for more."

Breakfast over, the gay company passed out of the Castle, mounted their restive horses and rode away to the covert by the lake. The Cairn that overlooked it was covered with pedestrians who, like spectators in a theatre, were waiting for the play to begin. Does any one doubt that the sporting instinct is strong in Englishmen? Observe that poor old man in clean smock-frock and white beaver. This is Dick Hal. He can't see

very well, but he would like to hear the cry of the hounds once more. He began earthstopping the year Bonaparte died at St Helena, and this morning a little child has led him to the Cairn that he might perchance hear the music he loved so well. And it seemed probable, so rarely had the brake been found tenantless, that he and the rest, younger and noisier in their expectation of sport, would not be disappointed.

The cry of the huntsman in the bottoms at once hushes the hum of the crowd. Ears strain to catch the first whimper, and eager eyes search every yard of open ground to view the stealthy movements of a fox. Under the shelter of a boulder, apart from the crowd, sits Jim Roscruge, the old mining pioneer, and near him a man in velveteen coat and sealskin cap who looks the incarnation of vigilance.

Surely we have seen that cheery face before—it's Andrew the Earthstopper, looking little the worse for his night's adventures. The leading hounds had come through the brake. "Saams to me," says Roscruge, "that Nute drawed a bit too quick like. A fox'll sometimes lie as close as a sittin' perthridge." "May be you're right: but Joe Nute do knaw 'es work, and, lor', what moosic's in the voice of un! Harkee! . . . Grand, edna you? Saam

time I niver seed the brake drawed blank but wance afore."

The field began to move slowly to the next cover whilst the hounds ran through some crofts where the furze was thin.

"Wild country this, Tresillian," said the Major of Sir Bevil's old battery as they rode along side by side.

"Yes, it's more or less like this all the way to Dartmoor, heather and gorse on the surface, tin and copper underground. It's the backbone of the county in more sense than one."

"And Lyonnesse must be somewhere near?"

"That" said Sir Bevil, smiling, "is the submerged land between the Land's End and the Scillies. Scientists, confound 'em, are trying to prove that the sea has covered it since the Creation. What right have they got to meddle with our traditions? They'll be saying next that the letters * on the Men Scryfa—it's in a croft over that ridge facing us—have been cut out by the action of the weather on the granite."

"Well, Andrew," said Sir Bevil as he rode up, "where do you think we may find to-day?"

"I caan't hardly tell, sir," said he, keeping pace

* Riolabran Cunoval fil.

with the horse; "but at daybreak this morning I balled a fox"—at this Sir Bevil pulled up his horse, —"on that bit o' soft ground under Ding Dong on the Quoit side, and seys I to missel, me shaver es moast likely kennelled in that bit o' snug fuzze to the lew side of the stennack."

"Very well, we will draw that next and drop back to Boswortha if we do not find," added Sir Bevil as he rode away to give instructions to the huntsman.

"Come ust on, Jim, best foot foremost, or the draw'll be over afore we get theere." They gained the crest of a rise overlooking the cover just as the huntsman, who was now afoot with the hounds around him, was about to draw it.

"Wheere ded ee light on they theere prents of the fox, An'rew?"

"Do ee saa thet big bunch o' rooshes anigh the pool, away ahead of the rock touchin' the Squire?"

"Iss sure."

"Well, they're close handy to un, laystwise I reckin so: 'twas by the furst glim o' day I seed 'em."

Below them lay a stretch of marshy ground fed by some bubbling springs. Rills trickled along channels in the peaty ground, sparkling here and there between tussocks of rush and withered grass,

losing themselves in a vivid green patch that fringed a chattering trout-stream. On the higher side, nestling under shelter of a craggy ridge, was about an acre of furze with a big dimple in it where yellow blooms lingered.

The scarlet coats of the riders gave a few dashes of warmth to the grey expanse of boulder-strewn moor.

Sir Bevil watched the hounds as they drew up wind, the big chestnut with its pricked ears seeming as intent as his rider. Their shadow lay almost motionless aslant the lichen-covered rock. The working of the pack was easily seen, save where the ground dipped around a pool or boggy growth luxuriated. Flushed by hound or crack of whip, a woodcock rose and dropped in some withes a furlong away. Still there was no sign of the fox, no view holloa, not a whimper. The idler hounds lapped the tempting water, seemingly heedless of the huntsman's voice.

"I'm afeard o' my saul 'tes blank, Jim; hounds don't saam to maake nawthin' of un."

"Nawthin' at all, scent's gone along wi' the frost. But don't ee go and upset yoursel' about et, 'tes noane of your fault."

Amongst the members of the hunt, disposed

in little groups behind Sir Bevil, the green of the bog and the gleam of the rippling water showing between them, expectation drooped, and the little cares of life that a whimper would have kept to the crupper, seizing their opportunity, began to steal back to their owners.

The doctor's eyes wandered to the lonely cottage; the shipowner found himself thinking of the fall in freights, the miner of the drop in tin; and even the red-whiskered farmer was wondering whether the ten-score pig hanging by the heels in his outhouse would fetch 4¾d. or 5d. a lb. on the next market day.

Suddenly Troubadour, the most reliable hound of the pack, threw up his nose as he whiffed the tainted air.

"He's got un, Jim. See how eh crosses the line o' scent see-saw like. 'Pend upon et, 'tes a find."

The hound now left the edge of the cover near the bog and worked round its upper side. Losing the scent he came back, recovered it, threw his tongue and dashed into the brake.

"Thet's what I do caal rason in a dog," whispered Andrew, whilst his restless eyes watched every point of escape for a view of the fox.

In a moment the pack rallied to the trusted

voice of Troubadour, and the furze was soon alive with waving sterns.

"What moosic, Jim! Look out, slyboots 'll be gone in a twinklin'."

"Theere's the fox staling away along by them theere brembles."

"I caan't see un," said Roscruge. And truly none but a trained eye like Andrew's, which saw a suspicion of brown here and a tell-tale movement of tangled growth beyond, could mark the course of the sly varmint. It had eluded the gaze of the whippers-in. Grasping the situation, Andrew ran to where he last saw the fox and gave a loud tally-ho.

Then all was stir: the field seemed electrified. Shipowner, miner, farmer, ay and squire, parson, soldier and whipper-in, each forgot his worries—for who has none?—and black care lay in the wake of the hunt.

"Lor', how they do race," said Andrew as the hounds, with a burst of music, streamed across the heather. "The fox is maakin' for cleff. Desperate plaace thet; but as luck will have et the tide is out." The hunt was now lost to view, but with his hand raised to shade his eyes he kept looking towards the Galver. . . .

"They're crossin' the sky line. Do ee see 'em, Jim?"

"Iss, and ef I baan't mistaken, the white hoss es laast as usual."

Tregellas had been busy in the cattle-shed since early morning, and now, having put a double feed in the troughs and filled the racks with sweet-smelling hay, was about to leave work and put on his Sunday-best, after the custom of Feast Day, that his appearance might do credit to his side of the parish when he sauntered past the critical eyes of the girls of Churchtown.

Just then Driver, who had been curled up in the straw dreaming of summer days amongst the moor-land cattle, pricked his ears, rose to his feet, jumped the half-door, and barked furiously.

"What's thet?" said Tregellas as the music of the pack awoke the echoes of the cliffs. "Why 'tes the hounds in full cry sure 'nuff." Out of the byre he rushed and climbed the turf rick near the pig's crow, hoping to get a view of the hunt. The passing chase was one of the few excitements of his dull life; and next to a sly glance at the girl of his heart the sight of a fox before hounds was what he loved most.

His eager eyes searched the rugged hillside and

swept the open sward lying between it and the cliff. A sea-gull skimming its pinnacled edge drew his gaze that way. It was only for an instant; yet when he looked round again, the fox with an easy stride was crossing the springy turf where in summer thrift blooms, and discovering dips in the ground where human eye found none, with lithe movement was making for his earth near the foot of the cliffs. "Lor', what a beety! how eh do move over the ground that steelthy like! What a broosh! Wonder ef he's the saame varmint as killed the auld gander."

Thrice before the fox had stood before hounds, and the last time he had but narrowly escaped with his life. Less than a year ago, it was in the month of March, they had found him on the sunny cliffs where Lamorna overlooks the ocean, and the great run he gave that day from sea to sea is still vivid in the memory of the hunt.

This morning dawn had surprised him miles away from his rocky stronghold. For hours before daybreak he had lain in wait with glowing eyes under the shelter of some rustling sedge that grew amidst the waters of a pool, for wildfowl. His listening ears caught the swish of their tantalising wingbeats as skein after skein circled above his

THE FOX.

[*Face page* 26.

lurking-place, but he had awaited in vain the splash of widgeon or teal on the lane of water he had opened in the thin ice as he swam to his "islet" ambush. Hunger and expectation had kept him there too long and, in the grey light that had quenched the green fires of his eyes, chilled and famished he had stolen away to the near brake, and under its thickest furze-bush shunned those hateful rays that jewelled the frosted spines above his lair and gilded the crags between him and his earth.

Scarcely had he curled himself up before the tread of human steps made him cock his ears, and when the Earthstopper bent over his clean-cut foot-prints the ominous silence had brought him to his feet. But as the footsteps died away he had settled himself down again, and it was out of a deep sleep that the warning voice of Troubadour had roused him. Once more, like an outlaw, he was driven forth under the eye of the wintry sun with hue and cry behind him, conscious that his safety lay in his own cunning and endurance and the stout heart that had carried him through before.

As he crosses the sward there is nothing hurried in his stealthy movements, despite the clamour in his ears. He is not sure that his earth is open—

more than once he had found it closed—so he is husbanding his strength, and, if need be, every bit of it will be doled out under the direction of his vulpine brain in the attempt to outwit his enemies. Some fifteen feet from the cliff a slab of rock—outcrop of the granite formation beneath—brings back to his memory a ruse that the old vixen had taught him, when one August day at sundown she anxiously led her playful litter up to the great world overlooking their rocky nursery. This he at once decides to put into practice.

So to the amazement of the open-mouthed Tregellas he crosses and recrosses the rock as he had seen her do, hoping thereby at least to check his pursuers, if not to foil them altogether.

Leaving the tangled lines of scent for the hounds to unravel, he, by a single leap, reaches the verge of the cliff and for an instant clings to its dizzy edge as if to listen to the swelling cry, for his mask is turned that way. Then, gathering himself for a spring, with a whisk of his brush he is gone. This was too much for the spellbound Tregellas, good Methodist though he was: "Well, I'm dommed, that taakes the fuggan."

The leading hounds were breaking through the

furze at the foot of the hill, their voices ringing like silver bells.

Flashing across the open they checked at the rock, but only for a moment, and then, like an impetuous stream, poured down the cliff. Thither Tregellas, loosing the dog he had been holding, ran at the top of his speed and looked over. The scene below stirred his Celtic blood. The pack, with the fox a furlong ahead, was racing along the narrow beach, till, reaching a jutting point, pursued and pursuers took to the water and, skirting the rocks, swam out of his sight.

Knowing the line the fox would probably take, Tregellas, with the fever of the chase in his veins, climbed the steep hill leading to the Deadman and, though he bruised his knees through his corduroys, gained at length the topmost stone of the cairn that crowned it.

"Aal for nawthin'," he gasped as he overlooked the stretch of silent moor beneath him. The only sound of the hunt was the distant thud of hoofs where the "field" galloped along the coast road. Yet with quick, restless eyes he swept the waste as from that very eyry a sparrow-hawk was wont to do, watchful for the slightest sign. The echo of the horn had kept hope alive, faint though it

was, but now he has seen something which rivets his gaze.

He is looking towards the lower side of the moor, over the shoulder of which lies the sea, fringed with surf where it frets the black precipice of a headland. He is watching a bird that flies close to the stunted furze. The white of its plumage gleams as the sun catches it. Threading the sinuous lanes between the bushes, appearing at the distance almost like the shadow of the overhanging magpie, is the hunted game; and though Tregellas cannot hear the chattering of the bird, he knows that it is mobbing the fox whose mask is set in the direction of Deadman. As his form comes well in view Tregellas fancies that his stride is perhaps not quite so easy as when he swung so lithely across the turf, and it may be he was shaken by those terrible leaps adown the jagged rocks where a whipper-in, a coastguard, and a truant schoolboy are at this moment attending to two crippled hounds. "Es eh failin' a bit, do ee think, 'Gellas?" "Caan't hardly tell," said he, answering the question put to himself. And then the hounds heave in view. At what a pace they sweep over the waste, how silently they are running! With anxious eyes he follows them as they cross the moor above. "Dear life, they're niver headin' for Dead-

man, are 'em? Iss . . . iss . . . wonder ef An'rew stopped the eearth. . . . Hooray!" for standing on tip-toe he saw the blurred pack swerve near the heart of the haunted moor as though at that point the fox had been headed.

"I knowed ee raather die in th' open nor go to ground in that wisht auld plaace."

Then the field at full gallop passed before his gaze. "Lor' a mercy, passon's bin and falled into the bog," and he laughed as only a yokel can laugh.

Tregellas lingered until the desolate waste swallowed up the hindmost of the field; the circling flight of a snipe being the only sign that the hunt had swept across the moor.

The stout fox held bravely on; but the pack, racing for blood, with hardly a check, kept lessening his lead as moor and croft were left behind.

With what a crash of music they dashed through the Forest Rocks and through the belt of pines to the open heath beyond. Though death was ringing in his ears there was the gallant fox struggling gamely forward. Racing from scent to view they pulled him down on the dead bracken below the now deserted cairn.

The huntsman, Squire Tremenheere and Sir Bevil close behind him, galloped up in time to rescue

the carcass from the ravenous pack. The who-whoop was heard by the parson as he urged his grey mare, mud to the girths, between the pine boles. To him, when he came up, Sir Bevil handed the mask; the brush he had presented to the Squire.

Late the same night the parson sat in his study recording the incidents of the chase and, despite the strains of "Trelawny" which reached his ears from the "One and All" hard by, where Tregellas and his friends were making merry, kept true to the line of the fox and with graphic touches described the run.

Closing the book, he returned it to the shelf between the door and the pegs, where his hunting-cap hung. Then for the first time that season he took a map from its tin case and spread it on the table. It was a map of West Penwith, and was crossed by lines in all directions, reminding one of threads of dodder on a furze-bush. Those thin red lines represented the best runs of the hounds during the five and thirty years he had followed them. Having put on his spectacles, he dipped the fine-pointed nib in the ink and, starting from near the pool under Ding Dong, traced the run to the adit at the foot of the cliffs. Why did he pause

there, why not let the pen skirt the coast and the headland and cross the moor to Deadman?

See! there is another red line—a line that starts at Lamorna Cliffs—which ends at the adit, and as his eye wandered along the converging tracks he was wondering whether the fox which gave that great run from sea to sea was the one whose death he had just recorded. That is why his hand dwelt and why he raised his questioning eyes to the wall facing him.

He could not be sure, and the fixed grin on the fox's mask hanging between the cap and hunting-crop did not help him.

## CHAPTER III

### FOX-HUNTING, AS IT WAS IN THE DAYS OF QUEEN BESS

*Quoted from "Carew's Survey of Cornwall, 1565."*

"BEASTS of venerie, persecuted for their cases, or 'dommage feasance' are martens, squirrels, foxes, badgers and otters. . . . The fox planteth his dwelling in the steep cliffs by the sea side; where he possesseth holds so many in number, so dangerous for access, and so full of windings, as in a manner it falleth out a matter impossible to disseize him of that his ancient inheritage. True it is, that sometimes when he marcheth abroad on foraging to revictual his 'male pardus' the captain hunters, discovering his sallies by their espyal, do lay their soldier-like hounds, his born enemies, in ambush between him and home, and so with har and tue pursue him to the death. Then master reynard ransacketh every corner of his wily sconce, and bestirreth the utmost of his nimble stumps to quit his coat from their jaws.

FOX-CUBS.

[*Face page* 34.

He crosseth brooks, to make them lose the scent; he slippeth into coverts, to steal out of sight; he casteth and coasteth the country to get the start of the way; and if he be so met, as he finds himself overmatched, he abideth and biddeth them battle, first sending the mire of his tail against their eyes in lieu of shot, and then manfully closing at hand-blows, with the sword of his teeth, not forgetting the whiles to make an honourable retreat with his face towards the enemy; by which means having once reached his fortress, he then gives the fico to all that his adversaries can by siege, force, mine, sword, assault, or famine, attempt against him."

# CHAPTER IV

## The Otter

### TRACKING THE WILY VARMINT

With the putting aside of the lantern that had lit his way through the winter's night Andrew's thoughts turned to the otter. The mystery surrounding the ways of this wild creature drew him to it as buried treasure attracts the spade. "Ah, the varmint!" he used to say, "theere's no gettin' to the bottom of un, he's thet deep and artful. The fox valies hes broosh, but he's reckless, I tell ee, compared along wi' the otter. Night and day, the restless varmint's got a danger signal afore hes eyes."

The Earthstopper's words convey some idea of the subtle and wary habits of this nomad of our fauna, which conceals its existence so well that its presence generally escapes observation in districts where it is not hunted.

This is partly due to its having no conspicuous

holts like the fox or badger, being content in its wanderings with such lodgings as stone drains, hollow river banks and marshy hovers, all which are as well known to the tribe of otters frequenting a district as wayside camping-grounds are to the gipsies.

In West Cornwall, where the sources of the streams are but four or five miles from the sea, the otters' quarters by day are, for the most part, crevices and caverns in those mighty granite cliffs that keep watch and ward over the Atlantic.

Thence it sallies out when the twilight of its holt deepens into darkness, to raid the trout, and fearful of couching inland, rarely fails to steal back to its stronghold with the last shades of night, vanishing from moorland and coombe like a spectre before the dawn.

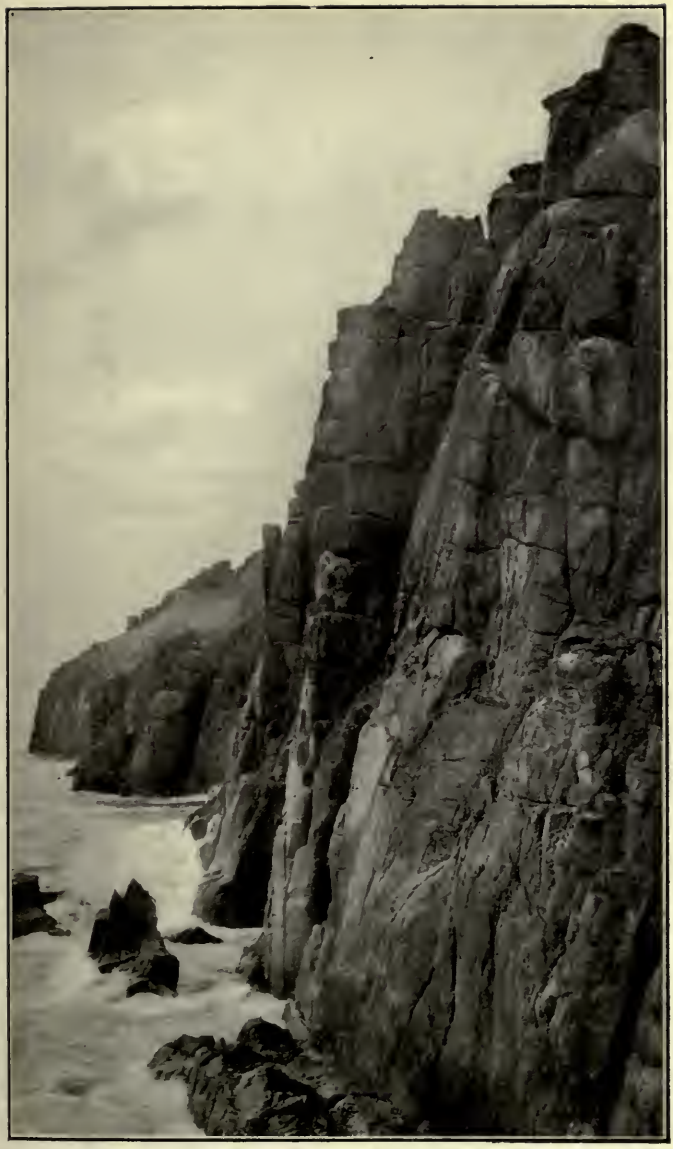
Tactics of this kind, well devised though they are for the creature's safety, are fatal to sport; and as the meet at the lake drew near, Andrew kept turning over in his mind how he could circumvent them.

To induce an otter to lie up near this favourite fishing-ground, Sir Bevil, who was a keen otter-hunter, gave orders that, to keep the lake quiet, no one but the Earthstopper was to go near it.

He, however, might have been seen there once soon after daybreak, stealing noiselessly round the margin as if he feared to awaken the spirit of the place, bending over the sand of the little bays and the skirts of the marshy ground to find track of the game. Years of such work and the love for his craft had so sharpened his keen, quick eyes that the faintest trace of bird or beast could hardly escape their restless glance. Not, however, until he had made his way round the creeks and crept under the rhododendrons fringing the bank, did he light on the object of his quest.

The footprints were clearly marked on the bare ground beneath the low branches, and impressed the Earthstopper as he stooped to examine them in the sombre light, not so much by their unusual size as by a defect in one of the prints, showing that the middle claw of one forefoot was missing. This would make it easy for him to identify the track and so aid him in finding out whether the otter had gone down the coombe to the sea.

Few sportsmen looking down at the lake, in its setting of wild hills, would dream that the poacher, after its night's work, would trouble to seek the shelter of some distant sea-cave rather than lie up in the snug reedy hovers skirting the creeks.



TOL PEDN PENWITH.

[*Face page* 38.

But the Earthstopper knew better. Too often had he seen the hounds follow the trail of an otter down to the edge of the tide, to feel sanguine that it harboured near the lake. Already, indeed, he was fearing, as he forced his way back through the wild luxuriant growth, that it had returned to the cliffs.

How those cliffs haunted him! Did he catch sight of an otter's seal shortly before a meet, as surely would the picture of the great granite walls with their impregnable fissures and caverns obtrude as it did then.

Leaving the lake, he followed its overflow down the valley, examining the banks of the stream carefully, yet dreading to come across a trace of the beast. You would have thought he had caught sight of an adder, had you seen him start back when he found the downward track in the low-lying plantation under Castle Horneck. It was on the bank just above a high waterfall which it would seem had caused the creature to land, but from there to the beach no trace could he find, though he spent hours in the search. It was possible, he thought, that to conceal its line of retreat, the wily creature might have gone down to the sea along the bed of the stream. This view would perhaps have gained on him, but that in its lowest reach the sluggish water

nearly circles round a meadow, and the otter must have taken, as is its wont, the short cut across the neck of the bend, and in so doing must have left its tracks in the marshy ground there.

Another solution occurred to him. It was by no means improbable that the creature was laid up in the plantation; for not only does human foot seldom disturb the sylvan quiet there, but in an angle of the stream, just below the waterfall, under a tall elm there is as inviting a hover as nature's sappers can tempt the eye of otter with.

Floods have bared the gnarled and twisted roots and hollowed out the ground behind them, so that the backwater on the edge of the swirling stream extends far under the bank, and is lost in the gloom it casts. It was almost by chance that he discovered, a few days before the meet, traces of the otter, that left no doubt as to its line of retreat. He was standing in the plantation at the time, aglow with excitement from having seen the fresh seal of an otter a little way above in Lezingey Croft, and debating with himself whether he should again follow the stream to the sea, when his eye fell on some moist marks that were fast drying and only visible in a certain light, on a flat rock half hidden by creepers. Faintest indication though it was, it furnished a clue

to the line taken by an otter, and though there was no trace of footprints in the gap in the boundary wall above, the Earthstopper felt sure that the poacher had within the hour passed up the hill on its way to the Newlyn stream which flows down the adjacent valley.

Thither he went at once, and after a long, fruitless search began to think, though against his better judgment, that the otter, if it had reached that stream, must have gone up the water towards Buryas and not down towards the sea.

Fortunately he persevered, and there just below a sudden bend, on a deposit of silt, was the cleanly-cut footprint, showing the defect he had first noticed under the bushes at the head of the lake. Before him was convincing evidence of the difficulty of tracking the creature he was pitting his brains against, for its path on leaving the shelter of an overgrown ditch lay among some wild iris whose leaves met above, screening all the footprints but the solitary one on the mud. This would have been washed out had the mills up the valley been thus early at work, and even as it was, a tiny wave from time to time lapped the silt as if striving to erase the tell-tale print. Holding back the flags to get a clear view, the Earthstopper gazed long at

the beaten path, heedless of the brambles that tore his fingers, or of the stream that swirled around his feet.

"The auld game es et, Maister Sloper? laast night a robbin' the trout, thes mornin' curled up saafe and sound in the cleeves of the rocks. Ah, you rascal, ef et keeps me up all night, I'll be even wy ee yit."

On his way home Andrew called at the Castle to report to Sir Bevil what he had seen, and to tell him what he had made up his mind to do, namely, to try and prevent the otter returning to the cliffs.

"I leave the matter in your hands, Andrew," said the Squire, "my only fear is that if it comes up, and the chances are that it won't, it may wind you in your hiding-place and be scared back. However, you know best about that. You won't go over the ground again, I suppose?"

"No, sir, I shudden wonder ef I've bin wance too often as et es; but I couldn't keep away."

"Is it the seal of a good otter?"

"The biggest I ever seed."

"Sorry to hear he's been in a trap; you've no idea, I suppose."

"Noane at all, sir."

All the way across the heather to his cottage, Andrew thought of what the Squire had said, but

reflection did not shake the confidence he felt in his plan. More than once, when he had lain hidden on the bank of the stream, an otter had swum past within a few feet of him without betraying the least alarm. Of course, he had kept as still as death. Almost in the twinkling of an eye the Earthstopper can become as rigid as a rock, and so disarm the suspicion of the shyest of wild creatures, provided they don't get wind of him. He is in sight of his cottage now, but he is still defending his plan against the Squire.

"Well, 'spose the wust, say eh is skeared, what do it matter? Hee'd be back in they theere cliffs long afore the hounds could come anist un, an' I'll warn ee, with a bellyful of the Squire's trout."

Rightly or wrongly, he determined to try to head the otter back, and even first to lie in ambush and see it pass on its way to the lake. But where?

It was this he was considering as he sat smoking his pipe over a glass of beer in the parlour of the "One and All," the morning before the meet. Save for Vennie, who was curled up under the window seat, he was all alone. Not that "Maddern" men don't like a glass of beer, but the leisure hours of an Earthstopper are not those of ordinary toilers; so that he had nothing to break in on his thoughts

but the tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil, and the clear tenor voice of the parson who was trying over some chants in his study behind the shrubbery. Sitting there, the Earthstopper could see, as though it lay spread before him, the tranquil lake, its tiny bays and miniature headlands, the silver thread of the stream as it flows through croft, woodland, orchard and meadow on its way to the sea, and every overhanging tree and bordering bush.

What memories intruded on his thoughts as he searched the banks for an ambush! how vivid were those of long ago!

In a patch of furze near the stepping-stones he had found a long-tailed tit's nest when he was a lad; in the dark pool under the bridge a big trout had carried away his hook and two strands of new gut; under the spray from the water falling from the wheel, during the great flood, he had caught his only salmon peal; between the apple blossoms that nearly kissed across the mill stream his young eyes had first followed the flight of a kingfisher.

Skipping the rising ground between the coombes, he lit on the track on the silt, and instantly he reproached himself, as he had done again and again, for having, in a moment of excitement, held the

LAMORNA MILL.

[*Face page* 44.

leaves of the iris and tainted them with human scent.

At last he pitched on an ambush which seemed likely to favour his vigil if the otter should chance to come up, unless the moon should be clouded over, or the wind chop round when the sun went down.

It lay on the bank of the stream midway between the lake and the plantation, and from it he could command the otter's line of approach. Let it not be thought, however, that he had no misgivings about his ability to confine the wily varmint to the lake, even should it pass him without suspecting his presence. No one is more familiar with its resources when danger threatens ; but the sting of past failures and the wish to be even with the elusive creature, above all, his anxiety to provide sport for the hunt, urged him to attempt the almost impossible task he had set himself. No doubt some will say he was over zealous, and complain—and with some show of reason—that he did not engage a score of helpers, who could have formed a ring round the lake and at a given signal have made noisy demonstrations. Those who take this view would, of a surety, condemn him at once, did they but know the fame of "Maddern" men for beating tin cans when the bees are swarming.

The Earthstopper, it is true, did contemplate calling in their aid, only however to dismiss the idea from his mind ; not because of any dearth of old kettles and pans, but through an experience of a year ago at Marazion Marsh, since which disastrous night—an otter broke through the line where two men lay asleep—he has "thought slight" of Gulval men, for all their skill in smelting tin and cutting early broccoli. But this tale must be chronicled elsewhere. There were, however, other allies on whom he felt that he could depend, and these he meant to make use of.

That afternoon, he paid a visit to Nute, the huntsman ; and had you been standing by the smithy at the corner of the village street when the school children were going home, you would have seen Andrew coming with leisurely stride along the lane leading to the kennels, with a big lantern in each hand, and the mouth of a hunting-horn lifting the flap of the side pocket of his velveteen coat. He had learnt to blow that horn as a kennel-boy, when he was little bigger and less educated than the boys that crowded round and plied him with questions.

Good-natured, if evasive, were his replies about his use for the lanterns now that earthstopping was long over.

Slowly up the street past the chute, where a woman was filling a pitcher, went the group, getting smaller and smaller as the boys reached their doors, until Andrew and Vennie were alone as they took the footpath that led across the heather to his cottage.

Over "a dish o' taa and a bit of saffern caake," he amused his grandchild with a tale of his boyhood, recalled by a dent in the old horn he had placed on the table.

## CHAPTER V

### The Otter—*Continued*

#### THE EARTHSTOPPER'S VIGIL

The sun had gone down over the cairn and night had drawn its curtain across the lingering afterglow, when the Earthstopper, with a lantern in each hand and the hunting-horn in his pocket, set out for his ambush in the bottoms.

He did not pass through the village, but reached the park by an unfrequented path, and was soon threading his way amongst the trees in front of the Castle. The stars were out, and the moon, now at its full, was climbing the cloudless vault and silvering the countryside with its rays.

"Grand night, couldn't be better: wonder ef he's on hes way up," said Andrew to himself as he reached the furze-bush on the bank of the stream, which he had chosen as a hiding-place. After concealing the lanterns in a bed of nettles and looking

round to see that he was not observed, he forced his way into the prickly bush and lay down at full length. He was not quite hidden, though he thought he was, as his bright hob-nailed soles projected a little, and nearly touched the edge of a footbridge leading to a farmhouse whose gable showed against the sky. To have a clear view of the ground, with his clasp knife he cut two peepholes in the furze, through which he could see the rough track on his left and a smooth pool on his right. An ivy-clad ash cast a deep shadow on the stream and track, but bright belts of lighted ground lay on each side of it, and the pool shone like quicksilver. Seldom does the footfall of wayfarer disturb the silence of the spot at night. About ten o'clock, however, a country housewife, returning late from market, trudges past ; thoughts of cream neglected during her absence, or of geese not securely housed from the fox, hurrying her along despite the heavy basket she carried. Luckily for her, Andrew has got over a fit of sneezing, and she passes the bush unconscious of his presence. When her footsteps die away, night and its shy denizens claim the earth for their own. A rabbit runs along the space between the wheel-ruts and pauses for a moment on the further bright space. To the Earthstopper its ears

are in a line with a big stone that holds the gate leading into a rough meadow bordering the stream. The rabbit has scarcely passed out of sight before a stoat follows, like a murderer on the trail of his victim, and is lost to view in the shadow of a hedge-row. Nothing escapes the vigilant eyes of the Earthstopper behind the furze screen, and his ears are strained to catch any tell-tale sound along the course of the stream. As yet there is no sign of the otter, and every minute that goes by lessens the chance of its appearing, for it is nearly midnight now and dawn is but a few hours off. Wearying a little from the strain of his vigil and his cramped quarters the old man begins to fear that the poacher may not be coming, and again it makes him as "vexed as fire" to remember the iris and the huge print on the silt.

All at once he becomes alert. Nothing has darkened the lighted space but the tiny shadow of a circling bat: not a ripple has broken the silvery surface of the pool. What can it be that has wrought this sudden change?

The cry of a moorhen, startled from her nest among the sags some two furlongs down stream; and if we may judge from his state of excitement, the Earthstopper must feel pretty confident that the otter is the cause.

At dusk the otter had left his holt near the base of Cairn Dhu. Ravenous after the long day's fast, he hurried down the steep face of the rock, and reaching a ledge which the waves lashed, dived through the surf in quest of his prey. The sea teemed with fish, but a ground-swell that stirred the bottom and discoloured the water baffled his attempts to seize them. A greyhound might as well have hoped to catch a hare in a fog as the otter to capture peal in the cove or turbot on the sandy bottom near the Bucks. Ever vigilant against such raids, the fish were only scared by the dreaded and indistinct form of the marauder as he glided past them in the clouded depths. Convinced at length of the hopelessness of his efforts, the otter landed on the Mermaid Rock to consider where he should go to get his supper. He is within reach of two streams and the lake; and their waters are as clear as crystal. Lamorna stream is close at hand; but the trout, owing to frequent raids on them since the gale, are very wary. Newlyn stream is some four miles away, and attracts him because of its larger fish; but what appeals to him most is the lake with its bright Loch Levens, then in the pink of condition. It was several days since he feasted on them, for the taint of human scent on

the iris had alarmed him; but, as he rested on the rock, hunger proved stronger than fear, and despite the distance he decided to go there, fully intending to be back in some coast fastness before dawn. By skirting the base of the cliffs, and running along the shore where a beach invited him, he at length reached the mouth of Newlyn stream. There was nothing to arouse his suspicions: the last loiterer had left the old bridge, candles were out, and the moonlit village lay wrapped in slumber. Passing under the arch, the otter stole up the coombe, keeping to the shadows of the bushes that fringed the stream. Within winding distance of the clump of iris he paused, but detecting no taint, passed between the flags, made his way up the hill, and dropped down to the Lareggan stream, on the bank of which the Earthstopper lay in ambush. Threading his way among the reeds at the upper end of the mill pool, he disturbed the moorhen, but heedless of her cry, crossed the stream, and pressed on at his best pace towards the lake. A few moments later—for the creature's progress was rapid—the Earthstopper, who has been shifting his glance from track to pool, becomes as rigid as the stems about him. His gaze is fixed on a shadowy patch, no bigger than your hand, under the lowest

LAMORNA SHOWING CAIRN DHU HEADLAND.

(*Face page 52.*

bar of the gate. He has not a doubt that it is the mask of the otter, for a minute ago that patch was not there. He tries to make out its long body, but the bars, and the shadows they cast, conceal it. What dread of its enemy the beast must have, to hesitate thus on the skirt of this rude track in the depth of night! It cannot be that it winds the Earthstopper, for the breeze that rustles the leaves of the ash, fans his flushed face, and stirs his bushy eyebrows. At length the creature comes noiselessly across the open space, as if making for the furze-bush, the moonbeams catching the glossy hair on its arched back, and lighting the dust it raises. Human eye has never seen it before, so well has it kept the secret of its existence. In the shadow of the tree it is almost lost to view, and then as it brushes past the furze, the Earthstopper gets a glimpse of its long glistening whiskers, and is sorely tempted to lay hold of its trailing tail. Why it did not wind him is, like other mysteries of scent, beyond the power of explanation.

Far from being scared back as the Squire feared, the otter, unconscious of a lurking foe, pursues its way to the lake. Not for some minutes does the Earthstopper back out of his ambush. "What a beety! ef I can only keep un up, we shall

see summat to-day: ef!" says he under his quick breath as he brushes himself down with his hands. Then he lights his clay pipe and tries to calm himself, for he has seldom been more excited. Unable to stand still, he walks up and down the grassy bank above the footbridge, as a sailor paces to and fro on a jetty, only more hurriedly. It is nothing but his nervousness that makes him puff so vigorously at the 'baccy, that stops him every few minutes to listen. Not a mouse may move in the hedge or a cricket chirp in the crofts above without his thinking it is the otter returning, though the raider is at the time seeking its prey in the depths of the lake and spreading terror amongst its finny tenants.

At length tired of his pacings, the Earthstopper feels that he must be doing something towards keeping the otter up. So he gets the two lanterns, stinging his fingers as he gropes for them. Notice, as he lights them, the change in his face since we saw him sitting over his tea. Had he committed a crime he could scarcely look more agitated. Even his uncertain stride as he moves along the track betrays his disquietude, and the blind way he stumbles over the wall of the croft is as unlike him as the smothered oath he vents on the unoffending

stones. One lantern he suspends from a rude granite slab spanning the stream, so that it hangs within a few inches of the rippling water. The other he fastens to a branch of a blackthorn on the far side of the croft. This done he climbs a mound amidst the furze and looks towards the lake now barely a furlong away. The surface is like a sheet of silver. No glimpse of living creature does he get, no sound reaches his ears but the voice of the fall and the song of a sedge-warbler. Retracing his steps he takes up a position on the rugged slope near the corner of the park.

It was close on two o'clock, judged by the stars, before he took the horn from his pocket. He might well have postponed blowing it a little while, but he could stand the strain of waiting no longer. Only by great self-restraint had he prevented himself from beginning an hour earlier; for more than once he thought he heard the otter breaking back, and each time his trembling hand had sought the horn. It was a relief to him when at last he raised it to his lips.

Now the Earthstopper is deep-chested and sound of lung, and he was so fearful that the otter might not hear the notes, that he blew with needless vigour and frequency. How groundless his fears

were! In the stillness those blasts were heard for miles. So near did they seem to old Jenny at the park gates that she thought they came from the plantation behind the lodge. The Earthstopper had not handled a hunting-horn since his boyhood, much less blown one in the dead of night; and it never entered his head that his noisy proceedings could alarm the countryside and lead to a breach of the peace between his harmless neighbours. But so it was. Presently he heard the door of the farmhouse violently slammed. "Hullo, T'wheela's movin' early thes mornin'." Certainly, unless the farmer suspected that a poaching hedgehog was the cause of the falling off in the cow's milk, it was early for him to be moving.

Old Jenny and farmer Trewheela, however, are by no means the only persons in the parish roused by the untimely music, which had made the Squire's hunters prick their ears and set all the cocks a-crowing. "Maddern" Churchtown is less than a mile away as sound travels, the wind was not unfavourable, and the notes of the horn were so penetrating that the Earthstopper might nearly as well have been serenading the villagers from the heaping stock of the "One and All." Little wonder that the heavy sleepers were turning under their blankets

before he had been blowing many minutes, and that the old men were lifting their stiff limbs out of bed and opening their windows.

"What be et, Jim?" said the parish clerk, whose white-nightcapped head was set in a framework of thatch, to a silver-haired veteran across the narrow street.

"Caan't saay, I'm sure. Ef et happened when I wore a boay I should ha' ben afeerd that Boney had landed."

Toot, toot, toot. "He's goin' for'n braave an' no mistake. Wonder who eh es?"

Toot, toot, toot.

By this time heads were sticking out of all the upper windows save one behind which a poor woman lay sick.

In the street below, Trudger, the constable, whom the first blast of the horn had stricken with the trembles, was now parading as if the incessant tooting were as ordinary an occurrence as the midnight chiming of the village clock.

"Well, doan't ee hear nawthin'?" said the parish clerk, taking upon himself, in the absence of the parson, the duty of spokesman. Toot, toot. "Iss, iss, I hear un right enuf. 'Tes no business o' mine, 'tes outside my beat." Toot, toot, toot. "'Tes

in the corner o' the park, I tell ee, down below the bastion. I'm sartin on et."

"No tedn, 'tes over in Paul parish."

"Ain't afeerd of the auld Squire and his hounds, are ee?" said a woman with a shrill voice. "I'll come wy ee ef thee art."

At length the constable, stung by many taunts, was driven out by the force of upstairs opinion, and set off at the rate of about two miles an hour, to show that he was not to be hurried.

Thus it chanced that the farmer and the constable, attracted by the same cause, but impelled by different motives, were approaching the Earthstopper from opposite directions. Trewheela's naturally high temper was not sweetened by his sudden awakening out of a dream in which he found himself selling basket after basket of butter at half-a-crown a pound, and the way he strode across his bridge augured badly for the disturber of the peace if the farmer could set hands on him.

Hearing him coming, the Earthstopper, on whom the truth slowly broke, blew a stirring blast —for was there not the otter to be kept up?—and hid himself where, without being seen himself, he could see what should happen. In a very few minutes Trewheela was standing on the very spot

from which the tooting had seemed to come, and a casual observer might have thought from the eager way he looked here, there, and everywhere, that he was mightily taken by the landscape. The scene was indeed very beautiful, and chastened as it was by the silvering rays it would have calmed many a savage breast. It worked no soothing effect on the farmer, whose anger at not finding the offender became unbounded. He regretted that he had not brought his sheep-dog as well as a horse-whip. In all the impotence of baffled rage he stood still under the shadow of a tree, but to his great relief soon heard someone stealing along the other side of the thick-set hedge which separated him from the park. "Ah, the'rt theere, arta, Maister Boogler? Out of breeth with blawin', are ee? Thee'll be singin' a defrant toon in a minit, I reckon," he whispered to himself with malicious delight as his hand tightened on the handle of the whip. Within a few yards of where he had been standing was a narrow gap; and the farmer, who was moving as stealthily as his unlaced boots would permit, at the same pace as the constable, in making for the gap nearly trod on Andrew's head. We will not, however, dwell on the feelings of the latter, for the constable, undignified as is the way he is being stalked, claims our attention.

He has had a terrible time since leaving the village. Half-way down the long avenue he heard, or thought he heard, a light footfall as of one pursuing him. The more he hurried his steps, the more distinctly he heard it, and the closer it seemed to be. Near the haunted terrace, just past the marble statue, the thing, whatever it was, was all but on him, and he felt inclined to scream. There was another way out of the difficulty, and this he took. As fast as "regulation" boots could carry him, athwart the great park he fled to the one outlet he knew of except the road he came by. Breathless with his efforts he is following the hedge to find the gap. The farmer is already crouching there.

On the scuffle that followed there is no need to dwell. Little is known of it, as the combatants have never opened their mouths on the subject, and Andrew confesses to being so overcome that tears filled his eyes and prevented him from seeing through the hedge which of the two was oftenest uppermost. The combat was too furious to last long, and the opponents rose to their feet after a short time; but not before the farmer, who had by this worked off some of the rage that blinded him, had caught the glint of the constable's buttons.

"What ded ee haave to me with that there whip for?" said the constable gasping for breath.

"I'll tell ee what for. Dust a think I be goin' to have me skull scat abroad wi' that theere troonshun of yourn?"

"I must do me dooty, an' I shud like to knaw what you'm a' doin' hereabouts disturbin' the paace of the parish."

"What do ee maan? I heerd a most ghastly noise down in the bottoms, an I've coomed out in the middel of the night to see what et es. The scoundrel what maade that unearthly row ought to be thrashed, an' I took thee for un. What was ee a doin' crawlin' like a rabbot down the hedge like this here"—he imitated the movement of the constable—"ef thee's nawthin' to do with et?"

Despite his attempt to put the constable in the wrong there was a distinct change in the tone of his voice; for visions of Bodmin gaol floated before his eyes. Fortunately both saw that the least said would be the soonest mended; and after all, as the farmer would be able to recover his boots at daybreak, the only damage done was to the constable's helmet.

"Well, look here," said the farmer, "summons me ef thee's got a mind to, but thee'll be the laafin'

stock of the court. Semmen to me, we've made fools won of t'other; but what I do waant to knaw es, who the devil have been too—tooting ef et edden thee?—Who es eh? and wheere be un gone to?"

"Dedn thee saa no wan?"

"No wan but thee."

"Well, I've had my own mispicions about who eh es from the furst."

"Who do ee maan?"

"Don't et strike ee who eh might be?" said the constable in a chilling whisper.

"No," was the whispered reply, after a pause.

"Who do ee maan?"

"Ded ee ever hear tell ef the auld Squire blawed the horn?"

"Man alive, I niver thought o' thet. Moast likely you'm right. Moore nor wance my auld woman has wok' me up in the dead of night to listen to cry o' hounds. Passel o' nonsonce, I'd say, but 'pend upon et her heerd summat."

"Good Lor'! wha—what's thet glidin' along by they theere trees?"

"Wheere? wheere? Lor' a mercy. I'm turned cold as a quilkan a' moast. Feel my hand."

The Earthstopper was biting a bit of furze to prevent himself from exploding with laughter, and

fearing he could control himself no longer he resolved to give them a toot on the horn and to trust to their state of perturbation for a satisfactory issue.

At a distance of fifteen paces he blew such a blast as otter or hound has seldom heard.

For a moment farmer and constable were rooted to the spot, then together they took the gap, but that being small for two big men, they struggled as violently to get clear of one another as a few minutes before they had struggled to come to close quarters. Though convulsed where he lay, the Earthstopper heard the farmer banging at his door, for his wife had locked him out for her own safety.

A crash of glass which followed drowned the gasps of the constable as he bounded along Boscathna Lane, scaring the villagers who had come out to see the fun.

"Well, ef that doan't keep the otter up," said Andrew, "nawthin' will"; and gathering up the lanterns and putting the horn in his pocket, he returned home the way he came.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Otter—*Continued*

#### THE OTTER AT THE LAKE

The otter had just landed on the island to eat his last trout before returning to the cliffs, when the first blast of the horn fell on his ears. Instantly the fish dropped from his jaws as though it seared them. It is true that he had heard that penetrating note a few months before when the foxhounds were drawing the cliffs, and, indeed, a far more hideous noise from the siren of a steamer whose hull, during a fog, loomed vaguely within sight as he peeped through a crevice of his holt; but at these times the ocean lay only four or five fathoms below him, and, conscious of his safety, he had curled himself up again and stopped his small ears with his paws. Far different are his feelings as he crouches under the pampas grass, peering across the lake in the direction of the Earthstopper. He is quite sure

THE OTTER.

[*Face page* 64.

that his enemy knows at last of his existence and of his present whereabouts, and that the tooting is meant to alarm him and cut off his retreat to the sea. Unnerving though the noise is, he decides at once what to do. No thought of seeking shelter near the lake hampers his resolve to break through to the cliffs. His powers of stealth and phantom-like movements are all in his favour, and surely he will succeed in his purpose. Noiselessly he dives, silently he leaves the water, and steals over the bank to the dark channel below the moon-lit fall, with lithest movements he slips over the shallows into the pools, his long supple body twisting and turning with the sudden bends of the narrow stream. In his great hurry he is nearly on the light ere he can check himself, for the lantern hung below a sharp angle and a flowering fern hid its rays.

Quick as lightning, he whips round again, betraying his alarm by breaking the water. Leaving the stream some thirty yards above he makes his way aslant the furzy croft to outflank the flickering flame, but oh, horror! again a terrifying light is there behind a thick bush awaiting him. He retreats in earnest this time. Ignominious conduct, it cannot be gainsaid, for a creature with the jaws of a bull-dog, for a creature heedless of the fiercest

lightnings or of the phosphorescent glow of the waves, and tolerant of the glare of the midsummer sun when basking on the rocks at the foot of the towering cliffs. He is not, however, at the end of his resources. Stay at the lake he will not, and why should he? There are other avenues of escape. In the next valley there is a stone drain, very safe, though close to a lonely homestead, and he may possibly reach it before dawn. He knows too well that there is no time to lose, so leaving the lake he hurries up the hill and gains the crest of the cairn without mishap. Now why, when every moment is precious, does he dwell in that clump of bracken near the Giant's Cradle? and at what object can he be peering so intently through the fronds? Does a lantern's light confront him? or is it, perhaps, the flame of a candle shining from the keeper's window in the clearing amidst the pines?

It is no paltry glimmer behind a pane of glass, that holds him there. Afar off, in the cleft between two dark hills, lines of vermilion streak the amber East.

Full well the otter knows these harbingers of the sun that will expose him to the eye of man, whose voice he dreads, whose footfall he shrinks from, whose smell taints the air and chills the blood.

He turns his lissom head and looks back at the valley of terror. The deep-cut bottom lies in gloom. Banks, creeks, island and marsh invite him to their dusky shelter. He can discern tree, bush, reed-bed and the sinuous outline of the placid lake, as he shifts his gaze from blot to blot of darkest umbrage. Differences of shade there are, but not a vestige of colour, save on the dome of a giant pine, the hue of which awakes as he gazes. Instantly the faint green flush catches his eye, and to the East he turns his mask again : "umph!" the rim of the sun shows in the trough of the hills : it is day. Even then he dreads to return to the lake ; after all it is early for man to be stirring and he may reach the drain unseen. Skirting the plantation he slinks along lanes in the boulder-strewn gorse, gains the edge of the waste land, and looks over. A cow is grazing in the rough pasture that runs up to it. He can smell her sweet breath, but he does not fear her. He is about to jump from the wall down on the grass and creep along a ditch leading to the drain. "Shep boay." It is the shout of the crofter he hears, and then the dog comes through the open gate and runs up the hill towards the spot where he is crouching. The cow takes little notice of the noisy lurcher, but the otter steals back along his own tracks towards the cairn.

The garish hues of furze bloom, lichen and pine stem, the dewdrops that jewel every blade, disconcert the belated wildling of the night, as with reluctant steps he steals towards the lake whose shelter instinct has warned him to shun. It is true that he knows its wild surroundings well, its hollow banks, its reedy hovers; and this knowledge brings him such solace as familiar fastnesses bring an outlaw expecting hue and cry after him. How he wishes, as he decides where to lie up, that the valley contained one impregnable stronghold, a network of forgotten drains, a clitter of rocks, a labyrinth of half-flooded mine-workings. He has reached the foot of the hill, and is stealing like a shadow down the strand of a little bay athwart which lies a fallen tree. Look! he is scrambling over the trunk: now he has dived. You will not see him again, watch you ever so intently. Without once coming up to vent he has crossed the lake some sixty yards in width and entered, by a submerged hole in the trunk, the hollow willow on the bank opposite. It is night in there save for the ray which shoots through a crevice of his sanctuary, and glows and fades at the will of the trembling leaves outside. The valley is awakening. The sunbeams that slant over the lichened cairn now bright as with outcropping gold,

bathe stem, leaf and petal, and dance on the rippled surface of the lake. Hushed, indeed, are the weird voices of night; but from spinney and brake come the songs of finch and warbler, moor-hens call amongst the reeds, doves coo in the pines, and a robin sings on a branch of the willow. Even the midges, inspired by the joy that moves all creatures at the return of brightsome day, have resumed their gambols around the gladdening ray up in the turret of the otter's lair. Why, look! the old vixen, who had been puzzled at the midnight tooting, lies blinking at the mouth of her earth under the gnarled pine on the sunny slope above; but fear possesses the otter as it never did before. Five years ago—he was a cub then—the footfall of a coastguard on the cliff above awoke in him the sense of fear, and from that night he had never been able to throw off the dread of man that haunted him, that made him steal abroad at dusk and lie hidden by day. Yet man had never injured him—it was in a life-and-death struggle with a huge conger that he lost his claw—as far as he knew, man had never seen him. But fear was his heritage as it was the price of his freedom. As he lies curled up against the sloping trunk of the willow he gets a glimmering of what had been a mystery to him—how it was that some

of his tribe had disappeared from their haunts, and why he had failed to find the skittish little otter with whom he had mated, though he had sought her everywhere around the coast and along the streams. A vague apprehension of impending danger kept him awake, and before the sun was high in the heaven he knew all.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE OTTER—*Continued*

#### THE HUNT

THE Earthstopper, having snatched a little sleep in his arm-chair, has returned to the lake to await the hounds. There he is, sitting on the fallen tree over which the otter passed three hours ago. Its footprints are marked on the sand between the lines of drift that tell of dwindling springs on the moorland, and of the winds that ruffled the sinking lake. In shape, the three acres of water resemble the shadow of a hand with outstretched fingers. The rhododendrons cover the triangle of ground between the narrow channel of the inflow and the creek next it; the fingers of stagnant water are fringed with reeds. The old man is wondering where the otter, if it has not returned to the cliffs, may be lying up. His eyes wander to the likely

places; to the island, to the hollow banks, to the clump of bushes, to the reed-bed over which a mist hangs, half veiling the blush of morning on the stems of the pines beyond. He does not waste a glance on the bare bank opposite, or its solitary willow whose tender green foliage stands out against the sombre hillside. Turning his head he sees the hounds coming down the hill below the cairn. They are not very wide of the line taken by the otter at dawn. Only a small field is out. With Sir Bevil, who carries the horn, are the parson, the doctor, and half a dozen others, keen sportsmen all of them. Following in their wake are old Sir Lopes and Nute the huntsman. Let me introduce the pack to you. Those rough-haired hounds are Taffy and Gellert; the foxhounds are Troubadour, Merlin, Cunoval, Vivien, Dawnsman, Padzepaw, Sweetlips, Jollyboy, Bucca, and Dozmary. Better hounds never drew for an otter; but the terriers are the wonder of this little pack. The one running alongside Dozmary is Vixen, who never finds a drain too long or too wet. What battles she has fought underground, her scarred head testifies. Then there is Venom. She is in her usual place at Sir Bevil's heels. A treasure she is, for she can dive and enter the submerged

mouth of a drain, and many an otter has she thus dislodged from its holt.

"Well, Andrew," said Sir Bevil, "did the otter come up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you manage to keep him up?" This with a smile, for he too had heard the midnight tooting. "I hope so, but there's no knowin', he's bin heere," said he, pointing to the tracks on the sand.

At that moment Jollyboy hits the line of the otter, throws his tongue and, jumping the fallen tree, takes to the water. The rest of the pack follows, Sir Bevil cheering them on. Swimming close to the bank, they make for the head of the lake, the valley resounding with their music as they pick up the scent left by the otter in his night's fishing. They are a pretty sight as they skirt the wall of pale green reeds fringing the nearest creek and leave the water to enter the yielding cover. Evidently the varmint has not been there, for excepting the sing-song voices of the Welsh hounds, the pack is silent. Leaving the reed-bed they cross the furthest creek and are lost to sight under the dense rhododendron bushes. From there the few otters found at the lake have been "put down,"

and the field is on the tiptoe of expectation. But expectations are seldom realised in otter-hunting. Not a sound comes from the dark green thicket except the cheery voice of Sir Bevil, for even Taffy and Gelert throw their babbling tongues no longer. Andrew's heart sinks within him as the hounds issue from the tenantless bushes and make across the inflow towards the opposite strand. But why dwell on his disappointment, now that the united pack—for Troubadour and Jollyboy have swum over from the island and joined the others—are only a good stone's throw from the willow? To all appearance, they might nearly as well expect to find an otter on an open beach. True, there are a few bits of hollow bank, but the eye can safely pronounce them blank at a glance, and as for the tree, it looks as solid as an oak. "Terribly slow this," says one of the field to his neighbour; may be it is so for him; but it is an anxious moment for the listening varmint, whose forepaws, the water, disturbed by the approaching pack, is beginning to lap. He is not kept long in suspense. Dawnsman's bell-like note proclaims the find, and the next moment the frantic pack is baying round the willow. Unable to get at the quarry, the hounds swarm round the half-submerged trunk, pawing the bark in

their helplessness ; but the otter does not budge. It is not fear that holds him there. He is bristling with rage and ready to do battle for his life, but only by compulsion will he leave his sanctuary. Not one of the field is up to thunder at his walls with an otter-pole ; but Venom, ever at hand, dives and at last finds the entrance, more than a foot below the surface. The otter sees the head of the terrier as it fills the hole, sees it rising through the dark water. "Yap, yap," followed by a short, sharp scuffle ; and the next moment the parson, who has hurried to the spot, views the chain of bubbles which betrays the escape of the game. A loud hew-gaze—what lungs the parson must have!—sends a thrill through the field, who have already posted themselves at different points around the lake. Not an eye is turned on the hounds, now following the game, not an ear heeds their music ; no, every one, even old Nute himself, who loves the hounds and has come out to see them work, is watching the rippled surface ahead to get a view of the wily varmint when he vents. As if disdaining the shelter of the banks, the otter comes up in mid-lake and floats there like a log, the water flush with his long back and his beadlike eyes gleaming in the morning light. "A grand beast," says the doctor with-

out taking his eyes off it. Yes, he is in the full pride of his great strength and without the help of the field ; the pack, good as it is, would never tire him out. His back is towards the clamorous hounds, and surely they will seize him ; but no, just as Dawnsman draws near, he dives, leaving a swirl behind him. When he comes up again he is not thirty yards from the fall. It were tedious to relate every detail of the hunt which went on for the next four hours, during which the hounds, aided by the hewgazes of the field, never give the quarry any rest. At the end of that time the otter, somewhat exhausted by repeated dives, which have been getting shorter and shorter, lands on the island. Little respite does he get, for Padzepaw and Jollyboy, finding him there, make him take to the water again, but at the expense of frightful wounds. Then it is that Andrew gets a good view of the creature as he seeks the shallows and swims close to the sandy bottom. With his forepaws lying against his body he is propelling himself with his hind feet. His movements are too rapid for the Earthstopper to see this, and like a fleeting shadow the graceful creature is lost in the dark water. It next lands on the muddy margin of the near creek and rests on a mass of drift lying there. Old Nute is looking down

at the fine beast over the reeds. The pack is nearly on him before he dives, but by swimming down the lake and doubling he succeeds in throwing off the hounds and gaining the shelter of the rhododendrons unobserved. A few minutes' breathing-space only does he get before Merlin, Dozmary and Vivien discover his whereabouts. Smarting from their wounds, for all three of them have been gripped by the otter and taken to the bottom of the lake, they hesitate to attack the infuriated beast as he crouches there, grinning and showing his blood-stained teeth. Not so Vixen; the moment she arrives she flies at him and, the hounds closing in at the same time, a terrible conflict ensues. Badly mauled though he is, the formidable beast fights his way through his foes, gains the water and dives with Vixen fastened to him. The terrier comes up after a time, but the otter disappears as if by magic. Baffled of their quarry, the maddened hounds draw nearly every hover, except the insignificant one near the willow where the otter is resting with just his nostrils out of water. Old Sir Lopes sees him there; but he keeps the secret, though with some misgiving, to himself. Forty years ago he would have shouted himself hoarse; but somehow he cannot give the hunted beast away this morning. Knowing how it

must end if he keeps to the lake, the otter resolves to try and steal away across country to the Newlyn stream. It is a desperate way out of the straits he is in, for it will probably mean death in the open; but there is just the chance that he may reach the safe drain below Buryas Bridge if he can only slip away unnoticed. But how is this possible? The space between him and the gulley that seams the steep rise by the ice-house is covered with turf that rabbits have nibbled close. Uninviting avenue of escape this under the very eye of the parson now posted near the willow, and with Merlin and Dawnsman swimming at last towards the spot where he rests, his eyes watching the hounds' white legs through the clouded water. Yet at this critical moment, when renewed hue and cry seem imminent, fortune favours the hunted creature. A tally-ho—by whom given Andrew was never able to find out—comes distinct and thrilling from the reed-bed at the head of the remotest creek, and draws away most of the field and all the hounds. The tremor of the bank caused by the hurrying feet at first fills the otter with fresh alarm, but in the quiet that succeeds he raises his head and listens.

"Wind him, my boys." It is the Squire's voice he can hear in the distance. Thinking the moment

propitious he steals from the water, dashes across the sward, and presses up the gulley at the top of his speed. His immediate point is a hover beneath a big rock below Skimiel's Bridge. The stream swirls round it, but a dry holt within is known to all the wandering tribe of otters. Only by a miracle can the slow-footed creature cover the two miles to it, before he is overtaken. Look at him as he hurries along under the shelter of that stone wall, as he threads his way among the furze bushes, as he glides like a monster eel through the coarse grasses, where the dew lies heavy. You are conscious of the great effort he is making to save his life. That dark spot below the high bank is the rock he is making for, and it is the silver thread of the stream surrounding it that you see sparkling here and there at the foot of the rugged slope. Till now he has taken nearly a bee-line, but will he dare to pass before the door of the farmhouse he is heading for, where an old woman is feeding the geese and a black pig blocks the narrow way. Do not wonder that this shyest of creatures recked not of the shaking of the old woman's apron, that he paid no heed to the pig which ran him neck and neck for twenty yards before going off at a tangent. With the lake now more than a mile behind, a posse of constables

should not make him deviate from his line. But hark! Faint though the cry be, the otter hears it. Full well he knows that his escape has been discovered, that at every stride the hounds are gaining, and that there is no twist or turn on his hot trail to check them ; but he cannot add to his best pace. Look, he has left the furze and bracken that hid his movements and is about to enter the reedy swamp which separates him from the stream. On landing he does not, like the fox, dwell to listen. No, some twenty yards below the rock he dives, nor does he come to the surface until he has gained its shelter. To his dismay he finds an otter in possession, one with whom he has mated. The cubs, awakened out of their sleep, hiss at the hunted creature as his head shows above the gurgling water. Only for an instant does he stay to lick the bitch's face with his hot tongue, then, after swimming down stream for some distance he lands and, reckless for the moment of his own safety, runs along the open bank in full view of the miller from Nancothan, who has tottered up the valley to raise the flushet of the mill stream. See! the old man is waving his white hat to attract the approaching hounds : he is shouting too at the top of his feeble voice ; but the gallant beast keeps to the open bank, and not until he is past the

shallows where the moorland cattle stand on sweltering days does he dive, fleeing like a shadow below the surface, more determined than ever to gain the safe drain he set out to reach. On reaching the stream most of the hounds take to the water, and just as Venom is getting dangerously near the rock Cunoval hits the downward line. Rallying to his cry, the pack flash along the bank and rapidly lessen the distance separating them from their distressed quarry.

Seeing the direction they are taking, the field, by a short cut, come up with them by the mill, where they have met with a check. Across the chord of a bend the hounds recover the line, and taking to the bed of the stream pass under Nancothan Bridge. The otter hears them coming, but another check gives him a slight advantage, and surely now he will reach the drain. Vain hope! Between him and his objective, in the narrow passage between two rocks that contract the stream, stands the Earthstopper. On finding that the otter had stolen away from the lake he guessed it would make for the sea, and has hurried across country to intercept it. Breathless after his long run, he has hardly taken up his position before he sees the otter coming towards him, breaking the water in its frantic hurry. Bang up against

his legs it comes, and as it retreats up stream, the excited hounds come round the bend and swim over it. Nearly exhausted by its efforts, the beast takes shelter under a bank facing its old path to the lake, and when Sir Bevil has rushed past, it dives, crosses the stream, glides between the flags, and following the track it knows so well, presses up the hill as best it can towards the plantation where the Earthstopper had found its tracks.

"Se—seen the otter, Andrew?" gasps Sir Bevil.

"Yes, sir, he's gone up strame, he's touchin'."

The horn recalls the reluctant hounds, revelling in the scent that the stream carries down. There they come past the Earthstopper. See how eagerly they are drawing the banks, how impatient the check makes them. Gellert, who has the best nose of the pack, is getting close to the clump of iris; the next moment his tell-tale tongue warns the pack that he has discovered the line of the quarry, and with triumphant clamour they breast the hillside on its hot trail. The game varmint has nearly gained the crest, but he can scarcely hope to reach the adjacent valley. He seems to be standing still, in comparison with the hounds, which, with hackles up, are now racing for his blood. He is not half-way down the plantation when they stream over the wall that bounds

A Haunt of the Otter.

[*Face page* 82.

it. Troubadour, ever to the fore, gets a view of the beaten creature struggling on; but above the ominous whimpers of the pack the otter hears the roar of the fall, and this braces him to a final effort. Troubadour is all but on him as he springs from the high bank, and the next instant the spray flies from the pool as otter and hound strike the water.

Without showing himself the hunted beast seeks refuge behind the roots of the big elm which, a week before, had attracted the eye of the Earthstopper. The otter is in sore plight, but little does he fear the infuriated pack now. They may bay outside his stronghold to their heart's content. But he's not done with yet. Venom and Vixen have just disappeared between the coils of the roots and are making for a ledge within, where the creature is resting and breathing heavily. Then Sir Bevil, the parson, the doctor, and the Earthstopper come rushing down between the trees. The next moment Andrew is lying at full length and listening. With his ear close to the ground, he can hear the terriers yapping six or eight feet below.

"They caan't get at un, sir," says he, rising to his feet after a time, his voice scarcely audible above the clamour of the hounds and the roar of the fall.

"Then we'll leave him, we won't dig. He's a

grand beast and deserves his life. You look disappointed, Andrew?"

"No, sir, should only a' liked to a' seed the pad of un."

With some difficulty the hounds are called off and the terriers induced to come out. The otter lived some years after, but Andrew never spurred him again.

# CHAPTER VIII

## The White Badger of Cairn Kenidzhek

### THE EARTHSTOPPER IN DOUBT

It is with some misgiving that I venture to insert this tale, inasmuch as the telling involves mention of a place so weird that readers strange to the Land's End district may be incredulous of its existence.

For to this day an evil repute clings to Cairn Kenidzhek amongst those best fit to judge its character—to wit, the few dwellers round the base of the rugged hill on which it frowns. Within half a mile or so of it, there are three small farmhouses, counting the one on the lower moor by the quaking bog where Jim Trevaskis used to live, and from the occupants, if you first win their confidence and are betrayed by no "furrin" accent, you may learn some of the strange occurrences that take place about it.

With bated breath they will tell you that on pitch-dark nights the pile of rocks is at times lit up with an unearthly light, and that now and then, especially when trouble is brooding and the death-watch has been ticking in the "spence," they hear, as they lie awake, the stony hill ring under the stroke of galloping hoofs. Whether these and other eerie happenings, around which legends have shaped themselves, can be explained on scientific grounds, matters not to them, for the Celt of the countryside turns a deaf ear to new-fangled notions and clings to the traditions of his fathers. But of all the haunting memories of the Cairn, that which inspires the greatest dread is associated with the disappearance of two men who were last seen toiling up the hill at the close of a wild winter's day. No legend is this coming down from a remote past; for Dick Shellal, Trevaskis' farmhand, who could count up to forty with the help of his fingers, had heard his great-grandfather say that the mystery was talked about when he was a boy as if it were a thing of yesterday.

On the December night when our tale opens, Trevaskis himself, as was his wont in stormy weather, bedded up the cattle early, piled the furze on the fire though the wind was westerly, and—a

thing he would never have done by day—permitted Shellal, who scamped the job in his hurry to get indoors, to put the wheel of an old donkey cart on the "riffled" thatch of the pig's "crow." Hours later, when his master had at length fallen asleep, and Shellal could hear him snoring through the "planchen," he himself lay wide awake on his straw pallet listening to the moaning of the wind, and, tempted during a temporary lull to gratify his curiosity and see whether anything was abroad, sat up in bed and peeped through the corner pane of the attic window. Angry clouds coursed across the face of the moon, and the sky was nearly as dark as the earth; but whilst he looked there was a rift in the black veil, and against the silver disc he got a glimpse of the jagged crest of the Cairn. Lowering his gaze at the sight of it, he followed the vague outline of the murky cone of the hill, and then with the quickness of thought, buried his shock head under the bedclothes. Coward! Let him lie there with chattering teeth, and with knees doubled up to his chin. The light that scared him, though it is so near the edge of the bog, is no pixie's light, no lantern held by shadowy hands; the feeble rays he saw, flicker on the path of as human a being as ever trod the earth. He should

have known who it was, for there is but one man whose lonesome duty could bring him there in the small hours of the morning, when the watch-dog sleeps, and the fox is tyrant of the farmyard. Yes, it is Andrew who threads his way in and out amongst the rush-clumps near the lip of the treacherous quagmire. But what is he doing there? Why has he not taken to the rising ground at his usual point, a furlong back, where the herbage is scant, and scarce hides the stony surface? Surely he must have missed his way, or he would not be following the widely circuitous base to reach the fox-earth in the valley on the far side of the Cairn.

It is not so. No, given to taking short cuts though he is, he prefers on this night to keep on the rim of the haunted slopes, and as near the bog as foothold will allow. Level-headed as he is in most things, the taint of superstition is in his blood too, and it is fear, excited by the story he heard two hours ago, that dictates the path he follows. Dropping in at the "Jolly Tinners" at Trewellard for a glass of beer before starting on his round, he found himself an involuntary listener to what he would rather have missed. On pushing open the door, he was surprised to find some half a dozen

CAIRN KENIDZHEK.

[*Face page* 88.

miners in the bar, and wondered at the cause of their silence. They were seated on a form in front of a fire, but their attention was apparently taken by an aged miner, for their heads were turned his way. Andrew, who feared there had been loss of life in the mine, stole into a seat opposite the old man, who, to his dismay, related the story of the two men lost upon Cairn Kenidjack, for so he called it. Thrilling was every word he said, even when dealing with the well-known facts—the sighting of the strange sail, the landing at the Cove, the path taken by the men across the moor, their conversation with the miners near the Cross, the spot near the Cairn where they were last seen in the gathering gloom, the lurid light that lit up the rocks, the finding of the broken claymore. But when with trembling voice he threw out dark hints of what most likely befell the missing men at nightfall, a deathlike silence fell on his rugged listeners, and so unnerved was the Earthstopper that he started at the creaking of the signboard, and shrunk from the thought of the journey before him. The tale ended, Andrew would have called for a quart of strong ale, but that he was short of cash and would not ask the landlord to put his name on the slate, "no tick" being the custom in the parish of Pendeen. Yet,

for the sake of the company and the brightness of the room he stayed on and, not knowing the gossip of the mining village, strove, but in vain, to change the current of his thoughts by putting questions about the "bal" and even about the ponies in the submarine level, which extends more than a mile under the sea. At turning-out time, he put the cat that had fallen asleep on his knees gently on the floor, and lit the lantern. Leaving the inn, he went up the road with one of the miners who lived on the edge of the moorland, and when the wind slammed Jan Jose's door behind him, Andrew, oppressed with a feeling of loneliness he seldom experienced, left the track and set out across the gale-swept waste leading to Kenidzhek, with uncle Zackey's version of the mystery vivid in his brain. On the way he stopped two fox-earths, his tramp till then being void of incidents, save for the startled cry of a snipe that sprung from his feet near the edge of a marsh, and the scream of an owl that glided past him where, to avoid some waste heaps, he swung round by a mine-ruin. He had not, however, proceeded three furlongs from the spot where Shellal saw his light, before he got a fright which, for an instant, paralysed his steps and all but took his breath away. "Good Lor'! whatever es et?" he gasped as

something white crossed his path. His first thought was that *his* fate had overtaken him, and that he would disappear as mysteriously as the two men of Zackey's yarn. Recovering from the shock and feeling the ground still under his feet, he moved on, his stumbling steps betraying his agitation. "Couldn' be a whi— a white hare; no, no, was too big for that and et didn' loup along like a hare. Was et a livin' crittur at all? Was et—rubbish!" "Pull yourself together, man," said a voice within, "go back and see if the thing left any track." Though the sweat stood in big drops on his face, and the gale which met him in the face impeded his steps, he conquered his fears so far as to go back. The thing had passed up the slope, he remembered, near the Giant's Quoit, for against that he had momentarily leant for support; and there he bent over the ground, his face blanched, his eyes wild but eager as if they would devour the bare places between the tussocks that skirted the trickling water. Two paces above, on the margin of a shrunken pool made by the runnel, and clean-cut as in plaster, the light of the flickering flame fell on the track of a badger. "Good Lor'!" he exclaimed, as the footprints met his astonished eyes; and then hurriedly retraced his steps. The farther he got from the

spot, the more strongly reason asserted itself over superstition. He argued thus with himself: "White, wadna? sartinly: the track of a badger, wadna? I should say so—" This with the trace of smile, for he had never seen more clearly-cut foot-prints. "Have I seen a white badger, I wonder? Auld Dick wance said as much and was laafed at for the rest of his days. No, et caan't be, and yit 'tes hard to believe et edden. Sperrits doan't maake badger-prints in the mud. How many glasses o' beer did ee have at the 'Tinners'? Only wan, worse luck? Es et saafe to tell the Squire? The Caastle waan't hould un, he'll be in such a pore." It must be explained that Sir Bevil took the keenest pleasure in collecting curious specimens of the fauna of the district. In the entrance hall at the Castle were a cream-coloured otter, a grey fox, and a yellow seal, but as yet there was only a grey badger in a case below three pied Cornish choughs. And here let me mention an incident which bears on the story, inasmuch as it serves to explain the Earthstopper's caution and hesitancy, despite his intense eagerness to report what he has seen. Some four months after the capture of the otter, he was standing under the Cairn near the Castle, at the edge of the brake which hounds were drawing, his eyes strained to

catch a view of a fox. A slight rustle in the furze, and a brisk waving of Cunoval's stern, had attracted his attention, or the animal he got a glimpse of might have escaped his notice. As it was, he saw only the body and tail of the creature as it flashed across a narrow opening between the bushes, but whatever it was, its coat and brush were as white as snow. Great was his excitement, but greater far was his chagrin, on looking over his shoulder as he ran in the direction of Sir Bevil, to see the snow-white creature climbing the stem of a fir that rose out of the brake. Of course, had he known that the Squire had brought home a big Persian cat on his return from Plymouth the week before, he could not have fallen into such an error as to believe that he had seen a white fox; cats, foreign or indigenous, being, unless their ears are cropped close, such inveterate poachers.

This experience and his narrow escape from making a fool of himself dwelt with the Earth-stopper, and occurred to him more than once before he had completed his round. His work done, he has plenty of time to reconsider the evidence in cold reason now that the powers of darkness have crept back to their lairs. He is sitting in the lewth with his back against one of the boulders of a stone

circle, set like a coronet on the brow of a hill commanding the steep slope over against him, down which the hounds will come on their way to the meet.

The sun that reddens the East has lifted the veil of night from the valley, revealing the smoke rising from a few chimneys where white-washed homesteads dot the countryside. Some cows, released from milking, are waiting for a boy to open the gate of a meadow; a flock of geese is making its way to a pool in the bottoms. The Earthstopper takes no notice of them, of the cosy rickyard, of the grim cairn beyond, or of the distant bay for all its roseate hue and lovely setting. His thoughts are centred on the ghostly thing that crossed his path, and as he cannot but believe, left a badger's footprints on the edge of the runnel. In all his wanderings he has never met with anything to excite his interest and imagination so much, or to cause him such anxiety. He feels that he ought to tell the Squire, but by doing so he runs the risk of incurring the ridicule that had fallen on Dick Hal. He has every confidence in Sir Bevil's discretion, but he knows that somehow, secrets leak out of Castles as freely as they do out of cottages. How unfortunate it was that owing to the wildness of

the night Vennie had to be left to keep his grandchild company! The dog would have flown at the thing if it were a living creature, and that would have dispelled the slight misgiving he feels that the prints might have been those of a grey badger which had passed up the hill earlier. But in that case what could he have seen? A witch? or the lost soul that is said to wander there? No, no, the sun is too high in the heavens for him to heed old men's tales. His mind is made up, he will risk everything and tell the Squire before the day is out, and the sooner the better for he will know no peace until his secret is shared. His decision made, he knocks the ashes from the pipe he has been smoking and, choosing a sheltered spot, lies down on the dry fern, and with a mossy stone for his pillow soon falls asleep, for he is tired after his long round and the buffeting of the wind. A couple of hours later he awakes with a start. Has he overslept himself? He looks at the sun. It is not mid-day, but still the hounds may have passed; Troubadour may have found him in the hollow where he lay, may have licked his face and gone on, without his being any the wiser. He scans the hills around, but can see no horsemen silhouetted against the sky; the few cattle in the valley are grazing undisturbed; he

listens but he can hear no tell-tale sound, no toot of horn, no bark of farm-dog, only the voice of the dying gale, the faint rustle of dried bents, and the whistle of the golden plover. He runs to a gap he knows of at the far end of the croft, but finds in the mud there no track of horse or hound, and then, on looking across the valley, he sees the hounds coming down the steep lane where it skirts a stunted plantation, the space between the huntsman and the whippers-in flecked with the white markings of the pack. The meet is at a small village which he cannot see from his station, but he waits where he is, knowing that the cover below him is the first to be drawn. And now he begins to think of his report and to turn it over on his tongue. It runs smoothly enough until he comes to "white badger!" It is not the word white or the word badger that scares him, but the two together. "White mouse, white rat, white ferret, white cat, white otter, white elephant, whi—white badger." Yes, white goes naturally enough with all but badger. Dare he tell the Squire after all? He becomes irresolute. He walks to and fro across the heathery space enclosed by the stones, and finally moves half-way down the hill and takes his stand behind a big boulder. Hardly has he gained it when a whipper-

in gallops past him to take up a position on the far side of the stone circle; then Sir Bevil comes up the croft on the grey mare, and from his favourite spot, which is some twenty yards away from where Andrew is, watches the working of the hounds. Seeing after a time that a find is unlikely, Andrew half resolves to go, there and then, and unburden his mind. Twice he left the shelter of the rock and as often retreated, but not before Sir Bevil had remarked his hesitating behaviour. A third time he ventured a little further, and then, if he were about to retire again, the Squire's voice checked him.

"Do you wish to speak to me, Andrew?"

"Yes, sir, I do and I doan't."

"No one trapping foxes, I hope?"

"No, sir, leastwise, not this side the country," said Andrew, walking up to him.

"You've bad news of some sort, I fear."

"No tedn that nither, sir. Et's like thes—I was coming down-along round the foot of the Hootin' Cairn, soon after midnight, when summat white crossed the ground afore me."

"What was it?" said Sir Bevil with a smile, the eeriness of the place and the superstitious fear of the Earthstopper occurring to him.

"Thet's just the point, sir."

"Was it twenty paces ahead of you?"

"Lor' bless your life, sir, 'twas touchin', under my feet, so to spaake. 'Twas a darkish night, for all the moon was nearly full, but the thing showed up as white as a ghost, and the sight of un gov me a bra' turn, the more so being where I were."

"Is that all you have to say?—I see the hounds are moving off."

"Only thes, sir; on second thoughts, I went back all of a quaake to see ef the thing left any track."

"Well, did you find any?" said Sir Bevil, rather excitedly; till then he had not seen what the Earthstopper had been driving at.

"Iss, sir."

"What was it, my man, what was it?"

"The track of a badger—of a heavy badger, the prent was that deep."

"You believe then, Andrew, that you have seen a white badger, a white badger," said the Squire, repeating the words deliberately and emphatically, as was his wont on the bench at crucial points of a witness's evidence, and looking the while straight into the Earthstopper's unflinching eyes.

"Iss, sir, I do; but aifter thet I wouldn't care to tell anyone savin' yoursel'."

"Be at the Castle at nine o'clock to-morrow morning," said Sir Bevil, somewhat peremptorily, and then galloped off after the hounds, leaving Andrew staring open-mouthed after him.

## CHAPTER IX

### The White Badger of Cairn Kenidzhek—*Continued*

#### THE EARTHSTOPPER ANGRY

Most of Andrew's deep thinking was done in the wooden arm-chair by his own fireside. There he is seated, the evening after his interview with Sir Bevil by the cover, considering the plan of campaign against the badger. The only sound in the room is the click of his grandchild's knitting-needles. Vennie lies curled up on the floor at his feet. The light of the lamp falls on the Earthstopper's face, and betrays its absent expression. He is wandering in thought over the moors and hills around Kenidzhek, and wondering which of the many earths he knows of, is the white badger's. By careful examination, he will find sooner or later a few white bristles on the walls of one of them, which will give him the necessary clue. Should

this plan fail, he will propose watching the earths, and will request the Squire to let him do so alone, lest the secret should leak out. Harrowing will his vigils be in that weird district; but his fear of ridicule is greater than his fear of ghosts, and he would rather have his grey hairs blanched with fright than become the laughing-stock of the countryside.

"I hope thee'st nawthin' troublin' ee, granfer?" said the girl, who had been casting anxious glances from time to time at the old man.

"No, no, my dear, only I dropped across a badger laast night, and I've bin thinkin' how I might come by hes eearth: I'm to see the Squire about et furst thing in the mornin'."

"But badgers are plenty enuf, granfer, I daresay Vennie could find wan in a few minits ef you were to turn her out on the moor.'

"Iss, iss, my dear, grey badgers es plenty enuf as you say, too plenty for me, the varmints; but 'twas a white wan I seed."

"A white wan, granfer?"

"Iss, a white wan; surely thee dosn't misdoubt me, Ravena?"

"No, no, granfer dear, I make no doubt thee didst see wan, and I do wish thee luck in catchen of un. You'll dig it out, I s'pose?"

"Iss, iss, the Squire says theere's only wan way of taakin' a badger by fair play, and thet's by diggin' un out."

"Then you must find where et's earth es, and that may take a bra' passel of time."

"Ezackly so, the Squire may fret and fume, but theere, nawthin' can be done till we knaw wheere et es. Now, my dear, let us be off upstairs for I'm tired."

After kissing the child, he went to bed and slept soundly. He was early astir, lit the fire, as he always did when at home, and, whilst the kettle was boiling, fetched a pitcher of water from the spring, and some sods from the little turf-rick, for the day's use. After breakfast he set out to lay his plans before the Squire. He had no doubt that they would be accepted, for he could see no alternative, and in matters of this kind the Squire had generally fallen in with his views. His surprise then at the sight that met his eyes as he entered the yard of the Castle may be imagined. The head keeper was seated in a wagonette in charge of three terriers; opposite him was a farm-hand with a collection of picks and spades; whilst the coachman, holding the reins in one hand, was putting a sack in the boot with the other. "Well,

well," he muttered as he stood near the big gates like one frozen to the cobbles, "what in the world es the maanin' of thes?" Impulsive he knew the Squire to be; but was there ever, thought he, such folly as all this preparation for digging out a badger without first knowing where it was? Granting he had seen a white badger, its holt might be almost anywhere within four miles of the Giant's Quoit where he had found the footprints, and inside that radius he knew of at least two score of earths: and was it possible that the Squire could have said anything about the badger? These thoughts passed through the Earthstopper's mind as he stood there resting on his blackthorn like one "mazed," whilst the men in the trap exchanged winks, and wondered what ailed him. There was one thing he could do, and would do, no matter what the consequences: that was to see the Squire, and point out the absurdity of going on such an expedition.

"Anythin' amiss wi' ee, An'rew? arn't ee going to jump up? et's a quarter to nine and we've bin ready since half-past eight."

Without replying to the keeper, he inquired rather sharply, "Wheere's the Squire?"

"Ee's gone along these two hours and eh left word as you was to follow on."

This made the blood mount to his cheek ; and for a moment he thought of going back home and having nothing to do with the business. But mastering this impulse he walked up to the trap without a word—his lips were too tightly compressed to say anything—and took his seat by the side of the coachman. In a short time the wagonette was rattling along a country lane leading to the St Just turnpike road.

"Wheere are ee drivin' to, coachman?" said Andrew, by way of a feeler when he had found his tongue.

"My horders is to drive to William Trevaskis' farm as lies under the 'Ooting Cairn."

"What's up to taake the Squire out so eearly?"

"Hi don't know that I can tell ee, but be careful 'ow you speaks to 'im ; ee's that hexcited, you'd think he'd lost the blackbird with a white topknot."

Andrew, who from the moment he had entered the stable-yard had been under the impression that everyone at the Castle must have heard about the white badger, would have been hopeful now that such was not the case, were it not for an otherwise unaccountable grin that puckered the coachman's cheek and the singularly jaunty way in which he handled the whip. However, he kept his misgiv-

ings to himself, and whilst seemingly engaged in following the fresh tracks of a horse that had galloped along the side of the road that morning, was ransacking his brain to remember whether he had ever seen a badger's earth on Cairn Kenidzhek. The fact is, he knew much less of the Hooting Cairn than of any hill to the westward of Crobben, nor could he call to mind a fox run to ground there. Had it been Mulfra, the Galver, Sancreed Beacon, Bartinney, or Chapel Cairn Brea, he could have walked straight to every holt on their rocky slopes. After nearly an hour's drive the pile of weird-looking rocks shows plainly against the sky; a few minutes later the face of the hill comes in view and at its base Trevaskis' house on the edge of a cultivated patch reclaimed many years ago from the moorland that stretches away to the northern cliffs. The sun catches Shellal's tiny attic window, the leats where his springes are set, the pool beyond the broad belt of yellow reeds, and lights the white-crested waves of the sea.

When near enough, Andrew makes out the farmer in his shirt sleeves and then—can he believe his own eyes?—three, four, five miners against the turf-rick; Trevaskis is holding a tubbal in one hand and—yes, a furze-chopper in the other; picks and shovels are piled in front of the miners; Shellal

is holding two buckets, no doubt containing water for the terriers ; and, by all that's good, it is a pair of badger-tongs that the Squire has just brought out of the house, his fingers fidgeting with the guard. In short, a more completely equipped party for an assault on a badger's fortress and, judging by the laughter, a more merry one, it would be difficult to imagine. But the high spirits of Squire, farmer, and miner are not shared by the Earthstopper. The elaborate preparations, no less than the hilarity, seemed to mock him. He foresaw that the day's proceedings would bring life-long ridicule on himself. The whole countryside would get to hear of Andrew leading the Squire a fool's chase after a white badger, forsooth! and wherever he went people would jeer at his powers of observation or treat him with silent pity, according to their dispositions. Now after doing his duty to the best of his ability for seven-and-thirty years, and being "plagued to death" well-nigh every other week during the hunting season by badgers scratching out his stoppings and letting the foxes in—an annoyance that perhaps no other Earthstopper in the whole of England has to put up with—for the faithful henchman on whom success depended to be dragged willy-nilly into this business was enough not only to rouse his ire but

to shake his fealty to his master. If Andrew was ever vexed in his life, he was vexed now, "vexed as fire." Near the Squire he would not go, unless sent for, not he; to a peremptory summons he would turn a deaf ear. Still, enraged though he was, he would not shirk his duty, hopeless as his task might be. He would search till nightfall, though a dozen giggling louts dogged his heels. He knew that the badger's holt might possibly be on Cairn Kenidzhek, but it was about one chance in a hundred. He jumped down from the trap before it reached the gate where the Squire was awaiting it, and seizing the opportunity whilst Sir Bevil was talking to the keeper, jumped the wall and going up to Trevaskis, asked him if he knew of a badger's earth on the hill.

"Niver had no bisiness," he replied in a very loud voice, "to climb un not even high by day. I laaves the furze-cuttin' to Shellaal. The nighest eearth beknown to me es in the croft under the Goomp." Muttering maledictions on the "git chucklehead," Andrew shied off long before the harangue was finished and, without consulting Shellal, who stood there open-mouthed and still gripping the two buckets, crossed the lane and began with his long strides the ascent of the crag-topped hill. It was

the best thing he could have done. Only by tremendous exertions could he hope to work off his rage, and how he did exert himself!

Seldom had he put his hard sinews and strong muscles to such a strain as he did that morning, when searching the rugged slope in quest of the badger's earth.

Now, he was lost to sight in some tangled gulley where he tore through stunted blackthorn and brambles to reach its inmost recess; now, on hands and knees, he explored furze-screened places between small groups of boulders that dotted the higher slopes like outworks to the rocky citadel on their crest; now he scanned for beaten track the starved herbage that margined the Cairn; now the crevices between the rocks for trodden lichen that might betray the badger's way to his fastness. All to no purpose! There remained the other side of the hill to explore; and thither he went. Some half-way down the slope there is a belt of ground so barren as to suggest a mineral lode just below the surface. Along it the Earthstopper proceeded at a rapid pace, his eyes scrutinising the edge of the sparse cover that skirted it. All at once he stopped in his stride as he lit on the run of some animal leading towards the Cairn. Some distance up it was joined,

beneath a thorn bush, by a more clearly defined track, and a little way beyond the junction, where the single track passed between two boulders and was arched over with dead bracken and withered bents, so unmistakable was the "creep" that the Earthstopper knew that he was on the trail of a badger. His craft was scarcely needed now, but he followed the trodden path jealously as if once lost it could with difficulty be recovered. Farther up the slope it passed under a clump of furze that there ran up to the foot of the Cairn. The bushes were thick and luxuriant, with here and there a yellow bloom, being protected from the westerly wind by the Cairn, and spared by Trevaskis since Shellal had struck against working on that side of the rocks without further rise of wages. On all fours the Earthstopper crept under them, wormed his way quickly forward over the dry spines, parting the furze above his head now and again to let the light in, and convince himself that he was following the track.

Some distance in he came upon a heap of soil at the mouth of a badger's earth. He restrains the delight he feels, for fear it may be abandoned. At once he examines the mouth of the set. The floor is well beaten and too hard to record footprints, no moss grows there, no spider's web curtains the entrance.

Lying flat on the ground with his head well inside the hole, he sniffs the air of the tunnel, but can detect no taint of any inmate. "Hanrew, Hanrew, wheere are ee?" It is the voice of Shellal, whose weather-beaten and scared face shows round a big boulder, whence he can see the eastern face of the hill. The Earthstopper hears him, but is too engrossed in his work to reply, and too far in the earth to make anyone hear him, except possibly the badger, if he is at home. "Hanrew, Hanrew," Shellal calls at the top of his voice; and getting no answer but the echo of the rocks, he hurries back, fully convinced that nothing more will ever be seen of the Earthstopper. Andrew then gets some matches out of his pocket and, striking one, holds it against the left wall of the earth. His face, which is all aglow, brightens as he inspects it. Lighting another match he removes something from the smooth surface and backs out along the track he came by, no longer angry and desperate, but excited and exultant. Sir Bevil and the rest of the party now arrived at that side of the Cairn are looking round and wondering what has become of Andrew, when they hear a rustling in the furze and at length see his hobnailed boots project from the thick bushes.

THE BADGER.

[*Face page* 110.

The stems of the furze have swept off his cap ; so bareheaded, but triumphant, he goes straight to Sir Bevil, holding up between the forefinger and the thumb of his right hand the precious evidence. The men crowd round Squire and Earthstopper with amazement written on their faces as they behold the white bristle—for such it is—and ready for whatever exertion may be needed to secure the trophy. The Squire, suppressing the excitement he feels, orders the bushes that screen the earth to be cleared away. When Trevaskis and Shellal have done this, Andrew gets permission to send in one of the terriers to make sure that the badger is at home. On being released by the keeper from the chain that holds her, Vixen runs to where Andrew is lying at the mouth of the set, and, after being patted and encouraged, enters the hole and disappears from view. With his head in the tunnel and with one hand raised to silence the chatter of the farmer and coachman, who are standing a few yards away, the old man listens to the bitch as she makes her way along the galleries of the subterranean fastness. After some seconds, neither he nor Sir Bevil, who is lying at full length with his left ear to the ground—he was slightly deaf in the right—can detect any sound of her movements.

## CHAPTER X

### The White Badger of Cairn Kenidzhek—*Continued*

#### THE BADGER'S CAPTURE AND ESCAPE

Presently they hear a faint bark and that peculiar thumping noise which a badger makes when moving along its underground passages.

"He's theere, sir," says Andrew. By way of response the Squire winks his right eye as though to say "I can hear him." A sharp struggle succeeds, and the yell of the dog echoes along the winding way. At last the Earthstopper catches what he has been listening for, the welcome yap, yap, yap . . . coming always from the same spot, which tells him that the terrier is face to face with the badger in an end of its earth.

Without a moment's delay, Sir Bevil instructs the miners where to sink a shaft to intercept the badger and cut it off from its galleries. The surface is

littered with boulders, but fortunately there is a clear space some four feet wide between two outcropping rocks, and there the men set to work. Whilst they ply pick and spade, Andrew listens anxiously to the sounds that reach him from below, his fear being that the badger may force its way to some remoter part of its earth and render their labour of no avail. Hour after hour, six men working in reliefs continue to sink the shaft through the soft ground between the two walls of granite. No child's play is this. As the pit gets deeper and deeper, the effort required to throw the earth to the surface begins to tell on the miners, who are working away as energetically as if some of their mates were entombed below. And here let it be said that digging out a badger, always an arduous operation, is frequently impracticable. Some of the sets in use to day, such as those at Toldavas, Bosistow and Boscawen-un, are of considerable depth and extent, and defy all efforts of the spade. Whether they are hundreds or thousands of years old must remain a matter of conjecture, but as the badger is one of the oldest of living mammals there is little room for doubt that it has had its earths in the Cornish hillsides from a very remote past. Andrew is wondering as he lies there whether the set below him is one which will baffle

all their efforts. As long as the terrier can keep the badger where it is there is hope of bagging it. But Vixen has already been for three hours in that stifling den, and during that time has been throwing her tongue almost incessantly. Incited by her yaping and an occasional cry of pain, the miners—they can hear her now—work bravely, despite their aching arms and backs. Suddenly the sound ceases, and shortly after, the Earthstopper hears Vixen as she makes her way slowly along the passages to the surface. Panting and exhausted out she staggers at last, and the next instant Turk, who has long been straining at his chain, is sent in to continue her work. Fatal interval! Alive now to the insecurity the holt it had deemed impregnable, and unable to dig its way farther on account of the rocky nature of the ground, the harried creature has stolen quietly away—at least neither Earthstopper nor miners heard it—and by means of a side gallery reached another stronghold on the far side of the Cairn. The Earthstopper, ignorant of this strategic move, is wondering why it is that Turk, so long gone and generally so noisy, is not giving tongue. What he fears as he continues to listen is that the badger has buried itself during the few seconds it was left, in which case all hope of securing it is gone.

. . . Ah! what was that? a very faint yap, a mere echo of a yap, reaches his ear. It seems to come —does come—from far away under the Cairn.

"Wonder if the men down below can hear anything, sir," says Andrew to Sir Bevil.

"Not a sound," is the Squire's response after inquiry.

"The badger's shifted, sir; I can hear Turk, and that's about all."

Then the Squire takes the Earthstopper's place and listens. "It's a long way off, Andrew, it comes from under the Witch's Cauldron."

"Iss, sir, that's where I maake et." The note of despondency in the Earthstopper's voice as he said this, served only to stimulate the Squire. The hopelessness of the situation would have daunted most people, but Sir Bevil had no thought of giving in, much less of owning that he was beaten.

Jumping up from the mouth of the earth, he rushes to the edge of the work and letting himself down the face of the rock, joins the two miners at the bottom of the shaft.

"Men," says the Squire, "the badger has shifted from his old quarters, and we must drive a level under the Cairn. Andrew!"

"Plaase, sir?"

"Give me the direction; is that about it?" says he, stretching his arm across the shaft.

"Iss, sir, as near as can be."

"Now, my man, give me your pick and let me have a turn: it's not the first time I've used one." Taking off his coat, he uses the tool with a vigour that astonishes the miner.

Fortunately, the ground admits of his working round the edge of the rock nearer the Cairn, in a direction almost at right angles to its already exposed face, and before long he has dug his way out of sight, and is shouting for a candle to enable him to see what he is about. A forlorn proceeding it might well seem to the old miner shovelling away the soil as the Squire fetches it down, for they are nearly a hundred feet from the badger, and at any moment may come on rocky ground and have to give up. The Squire knows this, but sticks to the apparently impossible task with his never-say-die tenacity. And when things seem hopeless, fortune befriends him. For to his surprise, after driving several feet, and narrowly escaping injury from a rock that fell behind him and dented the miner's shovel, the pick penetrates the wall of mixed earth and stone at the end of the level. Putting his ear to the aperture, he makes out distinctly the yapping

of the terrier on the far side of what, judging from the hollow sound, appears to be a cave. The discovery stimulates him to further exertions, and in a short time pick and spade clear away the partition that separates the workers from a cavernous chamber. The flame of the candle held at arm's length burns as steadily as in a room. Its light falls on huge columns of granite under the Cairn, and makes the mica sparkle. This is not the place to describe the grim remains that were subsequently found in this weird sepulchre. An article from the pen of that learned antiquary, the village doctor, in the records of the Cornubian Society, gives a detailed description of the bones of animals now extinct, discovered there, and of the skeletons of two men with their tattered plaids still about them.

"A queer place this," says the Squire, forgetting the badger for a moment; "a place for bats, owls, and buccaboos."

"Yes, a wisht ould plaace, sure 'nuf, 'tis a soart o' fogau, sir," says Andrew, who has crept along the tunnel, and is peering over the Squire's shoulder. "How deep es et, sir? I caan't see the bottom."

"Only a few feet, judging from the sound of the stones as they rattled down."

Then the Earthstopper lets himself down the

wall of the cave, and holds the candle whilst the Squire descends. The flame, held at arm's length, was nearly on a level with the floor of the tunnel. Guided by the sounds of the conflict, they thread their way between the rude pillars of granite, and at length reach the badger's stronghold on the far side.

"They are no distance in, Andrew," says the Squire, speaking of the terrier and the badger, who are going at it tooth and nail.

"No, sir, touchin', do ee hear un gruntin', wonder ef I can see un." Whereupon he lies flat on the loose soil, and holding the candle in front of him, looks into the hole.

"Can you see the badger?"

"No, sir, the dog's in the way, and the dust es enough to blind ee; but he's ourn, sir, we shall get un; white or grey, we shall get un. Have ee got the tongs, case they're wanted?"

"Yes, I'm holding them."

At this moment the man who had been shovelling comes up with another miner, with candles stuck in their hats. Shellal and the coachman, from the mouth of the tunnel, see the twinkling lights come and go as the miners make their way across the cave, and a spark or two struck by

hobnailed boots, and they start at Andrew's scream of encouragement to the dog, and the echoes it awakes.

"Es that your teeth chatterin', Shellal?"

"Iss, you wonder, do ee? bra' wisht auld place edna? don't et strike thee that way? mowldy smill about un."

"Arn't you goin' hover to 'em?"

"What? Shellal go over there? No, no, my son, not for the best dunkey this side New Brudge. Theer diggin' again: hear 'em do ee? Bra' fuss about an auld badger, semmin' to me."

Yes, they are digging again. The Earthstopper has taken a pick, and with his shirt-sleeves tucked up, is working away with a will, whilst one of the miners shovels the soil back, and keeps the hole open to enable the dog to breathe. The badger retreats as the sappers advance, and unfortunately the earth extends farther in than the Earthstopper imagined; but that is a trifling matter, as every stroke of the pick is bringing him nearer to the prize. It is only a question of time. The Squire leans against a huge rock, just behind the workers, holding the tongs in one hand, and pulling his moustache with the other. Every sound in the savage fray can now be heard, and at times the

excitement is intense. Once the badger charges the dog to the mouth of the hole, and would have shown itself, but that the indomitable Turk pushes home the counter attack, and drives his foe right back to the corner of its earth. For half an hour longer the fight lasts, and at the end of it the dog comes out exhausted. For once the bull terrier has had as much fighting as it cared for but, though its under jaw is scored with wounds, its panting shows that its exhaustion is due rather to the stifling, dust-laden atmosphere in which the unequal struggle has been carried on.

But where is the other terrier? why is not Nell at hand to engage the badger and prevent him from digging his way farther in? Unpardonable oversight! There can be no excuse. Squire and Earthstopper must have known that "fighting Turk," as he was called, could not last very long against the badger in that cramped, suffocating hole. "Look sharp and fetch Nell," says Sir Bevil. "She should have been here"—and would have been, had he but given the word. The keeper has no difficulty in getting Turk to follow him across the mirky cave, but what a time he is, getting the terrier up to the dimly-lighted tunnel from which Shellal and the coachman have already withdrawn. Hurry man!

What an age he is, making his way along the level! A child would crawl faster. Every second is of the utmost value. The instant the terrier came out of the earth, the badger, most formidable of all sappers, began to dig his way farther in, gaining at every stroke of his powerful claws on Andrew and the miner. Then the Earthstopper, impelled by a curiosity excusable perhaps, but certainly ill-timed, drops his pick, believing he has hit upon a means of seeing whether the creature before him is really the white badger or not. Taking the shovel from the miner, he sticks a piece of candle on the end of it and pushes it into the earth as far as his arm allows. Then he peers into the hole. Better that he had kept on with the pick instead of wasting his time! Not a glimpse does he get of the creature. The flame burns feebly in the stifling air, and through the dust he can barely discern the heaped-up soil behind which the badger has effectually concealed itself since the terrier came out. He hears the untiring beast working away with the power and regularity of a machine, though he sees not a hair of it; but where are his quick, faultless eyes that he fails to descry that bit of furze root amidst the soil? It would, at least, have warned him that the badger is near the surface. As he withdraws the light he

sees to his dismay that a big boulder arches over the hole, a little way in, rendering further digging impracticable. "I'm afeerd we shall lose un after all, sir," says he turning his face towards Sir Bevil.

"Lose him, lose him, why? why lose him, my man?"

"We've got into hard ground, sir, the rocks have closed in like the walls of a drain, nawthin' but a drill and dynamite can get through this cappin' stone," and the sound as he strikes it with the iron of the shovel reaches Sir Bevil's ears above the pounding of the indefatigable creature within, and makes painful discord to the music of the badger's claws. "Halloo!" says the astonished Earthstopper as he withdraws the shovel; for at this instant a current of fresh air fans his heated face, the noise from the earth almost immediately ceases, and he realises—what he had known happen but once before—that the badger has dug his way through to the open. "He's broke out, sir," says he excitedly, as he jumps to his feet. Seizing a candle he hurries with Sir Bevil and the miners across the cave, climbs the wall of it, and crawls along the tunnel into the trench. In a twinkling he reaches the surface and rushes in frantic haste round the rocks, shouting as he runs, "Loose the dogs, loose the dogs."

On the other side of the Cairn he expects to get a glimpse of the badger hurrying down the rugged hill at its best pace. But when he gets there, no sign of fugitive, white or grey, meets his disappointed gaze. Climbing a rock he looks down on the somewhat sparse brake, his eyes searching the motionless furze and waving bents to detect by tell-tale movements of bush or withered grass the whereabouts of the quarry. If it is stealing away under their shelter, the cover keeps its secret well. From its unresponsive surface the Earthstopper gleans no inkling of its presence, and with surprise, so quickly have the hours sped, sees that the gathering shadows are stealing over the base of the sunlight slope. Suddenly with a wild scream he leaps from the rock into the stunted furze and plunges through it like one possessed. It was only the snapping of a brittle stick he had heard, but it was enough; it betrayed the whereabouts of the heavy beast that had unwisely dwelt near the Cairn until it heard the hue and cry raised by the Earthstopper.

Attracted by Andrew's scream, Vixen and Nell fly to him, and getting on the line of the badger soon overtake it. "Where's the badger?" shouts Sir Bevil as he and the others come tearing down the hill. No need is there of other answer than Vixen's

yell to tell him where badger and dogs are keeping up a running fight by that big boulder half-way down the slope. All eyes are riveted on the spot, but till now only the terriers have seen the creature. A somewhat barren patch lies right ahead of where the bushes are being violently shaken. Has the badger slackened its pace that it seems so tantalisingly long in reaching the edge of the furze? . . .

"'Tes, 'tes the whi——, the white wan, sure 'nuf, sir, and a beety," cries the Earthstopper, as the clean-cut head projects beyond the bush.

"What a grand beast! but how are we to secure him?"

"Dust ee want un livin' or dead, sir?" shouts the excited Andrew in his broadest vernacular, running to keep abreast of the creature.

"Alive, alive, my man," replies the Squire rather testily, as the quarry crosses a belt of ground Shellal had recently burnt, and its hair, that all but sweeps the ground, shows as white as snow against the charred surface. With the tongs underground—the Squire had dropped them as he scrambled up the wall of the cave—and no man volunteering to go and fetch them for fear of losing the fun, here is a nice business for Andrew. He must secure the badger with his bare hands: an order easily given but difficult

to execute. The dogs too, good as they are at sticking a badger up in its earth, game as they are at meeting its terrible rushes underground, are powerless to hold such a monster as that brushing on there through the bushes and treating their savage attentions with disdain. Through close furze and brambly thicket it presses forward as if through gossamer, stopping but to make the terriers yell with pain.

Ned now arrives breathless with the sack, and not a minute too soon, for Andrew, despite his excitement, sees that the beast is heading for an old drain in the valley, in which it would find safe refuge. "Stand handy, Ned," says he to the keeper, in a voice so ominously calm and firm as to make even the coachman feel that the crisis has arrived and that the next few minutes will be worth living to a spectator. A barren space, it might be twenty yards wide, lies in the badger's path; and there Andrew awaits. He is only just in time. A movement of the furze, and its sharp muzzle protrudes, then the eyes are seen—they were not pink—then the massive body. Vixen and Nell, bleeding from their wounds, make feints at it, one on each side. Listen to the snapping of the jaws as the badger bites right and left at them. Clear of the bush, not a tussock screens the plucky, friendless creature.

Across the bare patch lies a close brake at the foot of which is the unstopped drain. The cover gained, he is safe. The badger knows it, and is resolved to reach its shelter. Andrew is equally determined to dispute the passage. The Earthstopper is not hampered for space; the semicircle of spectators give him plenty of elbow-room. With every fibre strung but under control, he closes in on the badger, with nimble, springy movement learnt in the wrestling ring. He looks the incarnation of wariness. He knows his enemy, he knows the risk he is running. Ill-timed onset may mean the loss of finger or hand.

With a cry that thrills man and dog but does not daunt the quarry he calls on Vixen and Nell to seize the badger, and stooping the instant its attention seems occupied by the terriers, he tries to seize its tail. Quick as lightning the supple creature, shaking off the dogs, turns on him, just missing his hand as suddenly withdrawn. Fired by failure and desperate from the nearness of the brake now scarce two yards away, Andrew renews the attempt, and this time getting a firm grip of the tail lifts the heavy beast clear of the ground, totters and staggers under the weight, but by an effort recovers his balance and holds his prize at arm's length. Then

raising it above the mouth of the canvas bag which Sir Bevil and the keeper are holding open with trembling fingers, he twirls the writhing, snapping brute round and round, and plunges it into the sack. It was the work of a few seconds, but the exertion brought the sweat to the Earthstopper's face.

"Bravo, Andrew," shouts the Squire, who with the others had been looking on breathlessly, "very neatly done: twice I was afraid he'd got you." After tying the mouth of the sack, the keeper slung the badger on his back and made for the wagonette. The rest of the party, with the exception of Sir Bevil, Trevaskis and Shellal, returned to the Cairn to collect their belongings. Though it was dusk, they succeeded in recovering everything except the tongs, which were afterwards found by the exploring party. Lights were already twinkling in the windows of the farmhouse as they descended the hill; and before they entered the yard, Ned had lit the lamps of the carriage, where they found him standing guard over the badger, locked up in the boot.

"A good day's sport, Andrew," said the Squire as he put on his coat which the Earthstopper had brought him.

"A grand finish, sir; but a very poor start."

The next minute Shellal brought out the horse which he had been saddling by the light of the stable lantern and held it for the Squire to mount. After a cheery "good night, sir," from the miners, whom he had liberally rewarded, Sir Bevil hurried home along the dark lanes as light-hearted as a schoolboy, tossing a crown-piece through the open door of the toll-house as he galloped past.

He was anxious to select a safe kennel for his precious and formidable capture. He chose a strongly-built stye, once the abode of a savage boar, and had it well littered with straw. One of the troughs in the enclosure was half-filled with milk; into a smaller one Sir Bevil himself poured a jar of honey. An hour later the badger was turned loose in this luxurious snuggery, securely fastened in, and left to himself. Early next morning Sir Bevil went to see how the captive had fared. The milk and honey had not been touched, but in the space between the troughs was a pile of bricks, mortar, and soil. The heap lay at the mouth of a U-shaped tunnel that passed under the foundations and came out on the other side of the wall.

"The devil! he's gone!"

Yes, the badger had dug his way out and escaped.

Hue and cry and search till nightfall proved of no avail. He had sought a cairn that overlooks the ocean, drearier and safer than Cairn Kenidzhek. Had he been content to stay in the Squire's pigstye, his would have been the life of a prisoner, pampered, but pining for liberty. He chose the bare subsistence and the freedom of the wild; and from that day to this, the eyes of cliff-owl and fox alone have seen his white form as he wanders mid gorse and bracken and fallen cromlech, within easy reach of his lonely refuge.

# CHAPTER XI

## The Hare

### LIFE STORY OF THE JACK OF BARTINNEY

It is difficult to imagine a wild creature making a harder struggle for existence than a hare in West Penwith. From beginning to end its life is one of persecution. As a leveret it can hardly escape falling a victim to the stoat, carrion crow, or magpie ; or, when full grown, becoming the prey of the polecat or the fox. If it be objected that puss has to run the gauntlet of these enemies elsewhere, it may be answered that in few parts of England is vermin so abundant. This is only in a measure due to the many strongholds which this wild country affords. In the Land's End district game is not preserved, and the absence of the gamekeeper and his traps accounts for the prevalence of predatory creatures, furred and feathered. It is curious too, to note how interest in the hare and the protection afforded

St Buryan Church.

[*Face page* 130.

it, have declined before the popularity of fox-hunting. Time was when it was highly esteemed as a beast of the chase, and when money was freely spent on the destruction of its enemies, though to a much less extent than is now lavished on poultry-funds for the perservation of the fox. In those days, as parish registers attest, the churchwardens paid with an easy conscience five shillings for a fox, a shilling for an otter, a shilling for a grey or badger, twopence for a fitcher or marten, and a penny for a hedgebore or kite. Whether the register of Buryan Church contains entries referring to the payments of these fees, I do not know; but there is evidence that in this, the largest parish of the Land's End district, the hare formerly flourished, its pursuit forming the chief diversion of the local gentry. Of these, Squire Levelis of Trewoofe was, perhaps, the most enthusiastic sportsman, and it is related of him in an old Cornish romance, that one day after a very arduous chase, at the moment his hounds were on the point of running into a hare, the astonished Squire suddenly found himself confronted, on the spot where the scent failed, by a witch. The belief that witches at times assumed the shape of a hare lingered in West Cornwall at least as late as the early part of the last century, for it is related of

Sir Rose Price that on his entering a cottage into which his hounds had driven their quarry, he found to his astonishment not a hare but a haggard old woman, whose torn hands and face removed all doubt as to what he had been in pursuit of. This occurred at Kerrow in the parish of Zennor. Squire Levelis' uncanny adventure took place in the Lamorna valley; and within the memory of those still living, this wild "bottom" has resounded with the merry music of "hare-hounds." No pack of harriers exists in West Penwith to-day, but the greyhound is very much in evidence; and all things considered, the latter state of poor puss is far worse than the first. What with "long dogs," foxes, vermin, snares, and cheap guns, this most timid of creatures lives in a state of perpetual apprehension. Nevertheless, it makes a stubborn struggle for existence on the lone upland wastes, where it enjoys partial immunity from its natural four-footed enemies, which, for the most part, harbour in the wild overgrown valleys that tin-streaming has rendered worthless for agricultural purposes. It says something for the keenness of the miner and the crofter that they should search miles and miles of bleak moorland on the remote chance of finding a hare which will, if found, in all probability run their dogs to a standstill. Small

wonder that to these men the few surviving hares should seem to bear a charmed life, and that those remarkable for stamina and endurance and recognisable by some slight distinguishing mark, should be as well known as a bob-tailed fox to the members of a hunt.

Of such none was more famous than the little Jack of Bartinney, whose life history was typical of that of his race. His first home was amidst a clump of rushes bordering a lonely pool on the high ground between two of the Cornish heights. Even when maternal instinct is strongest, fear of detection kept doe and leveret apart during the day; but she never failed to suckle him at nightfall and before sunrise, on her way back from the feeding-ground on the lowland. From dawn to dusk the leveret lay in the snuggest of couches in the trough between the hills, and when not asleep would watch the reeds waving over the shallows, or the moor-hen, whose nest was on the opposite bank, swim on the open water. One morning he saw her issue from the reed-bed with four fluffy little red-billed creatures following in her wake. This novel sight aroused his curiosity, and when the moor-hen and her brood skirted the little bay near him, he jumped out of the nest and ran to the edge of the water. At that in-

stant a raven flying overhead, on the look-out for food for its young in Bosigran Cliffs, espied him, and the next minute the ominous shadow of the marauder darkened the bright grassy margin, scaring the leveret and making him flee for his life. Quick as the moor-hen and her chicks had dived, before the depredator could transfix him with its powerful beak, he made for the thickest of the rushes, squatted and, though the raven made careful search, escaped. This was the one fright of the happy days spent by the side of the pool. There he got to know the varied voices of nature—the carol of the lark, the scream of the gull, the hum of the insects, the murmur of the wind, and the music of the ripple in the reed-bed; the chief sounds that broke the silence of the upland. From below came faintly at times the bark of the dog, the crowing of the cock, and at night the yelp of the fox, the snarl of the badger, the whurring of the night-jar, and the song of the sedge-warbler. Once he heard, from the direction of the Land's End cliffs, that mysterious roaring of the sea, which when the farmers hear they say "G'envor is callin'." His growth was very rapid, and when a month old, a spirit of restlessness and a desire to roam possessed him, and thrice he accompanied the doe in her night

rounds and got a knowledge of the lay of the country.

One day at dusk he left the nest and the narrow grassy green amidst the rushes where he had gambolled, and made his way down to the table-land alone. He soon learnt that the country over which he roamed was full of enemies, finding to his surprise that even the rabbits were unfriendly to him. His first form was on a pile of earth in the middle of a field from which the hay had recently been carried. Wild growth luxuriated there, and before he abandoned the heap it was gay with the golden corymbs of the harvest-flower. Thence he could hear the voices of the hoers in the turnip-fields, the rumble of wheels in the near lane, and morning and evening Shep's bark as he drove the cows to the milking-shed. Lying there all day, his long black-tipped ears flat on his back, and his dark, hazel-rimmed eyes that never wholly closed watchful of every movement in the life around him, the hare was a timorous spy on the ongoings of the farm where he was an unknown guest. For nearly two months he occupied the form undisturbed, but when the clover had grown again bullocks were turned into the pasture to graze, and one morning a lurcher dog that accompanied the

farmer on his round, found him in his seat and pursued him so closely across three fields that he would not have escaped its jaws but for the wiles he instinctively used. He did not return to the seat for some days and then, detecting that the stale scent of a dog tainted the ragwort, he abandoned the field altogether, and resorted to another form he had but rarely used in the valley below Sancreed Beacon. It was made amongst withering bracken on a mound skirting a small stream, and dawn always found him sitting in it. To baffle any enemy that might follow his trail, he would run past his form, keeping some twenty feet wide of it, and then double on his foil. When opposite his seat he made a sidelong spring, and then another which took him across the stream to the mound. His eyes, ears, and nostrils satisfying him that no enemy shadowed him, he crept under the arch formed by the drooping fronds and lay concealed until evening. He never failed to take these precautions, and he soon had proof of their necessity. Once, shortly after he was esconced, he heard a slight rustling in some brambles on the opposite bank a little way down stream. Presently a long-bodied creature with dark fur emerged from it. Though short of leg its agility was remarkable, and with its nose to the ground it was

evidently in quest of some victim's trail. It was a polecat, which, on hitting the scent of the hare at the spot whence he had taken his second spring, became terribly excited. As if familiar with the wiles of its favourite prey, the blood-thirsty creature began at once to quarter the ground in its attempt to discover the track. At length in making a wide cast it hit the line, but followed it in a direction contrary to that of the hare and, running heel, disappeared with long bounds through the gap where the Jack had passed less than half an hour before. Soon afterwards the light crept down the hillside, and the hare knew that the chattering, archbacked fiend would not return, that the danger was past. During the time he watched his enemy he never stirred, and had the polecat discovered him he could not have escaped, so helpless were his limbs from a strange terror that possessed them—one which he had not experienced when found by the lurcher. Fortunately for the Jack, his greatest trials did not overtake him until he came to his full strength and had a perfect knowledge of the hills, where in order to avoid his enemies he now made his forms. These he never left—not even during the breeding season—before sundown, when he stole down to the tableland. One dark night he was cropping clover in a field at

Boscawen-un, near a circle of stones belonging to a grey past of which no man knows the history. Whilst browsing, he stopped now and again to listen, as was his wont, and anon he heard a cry that made his blood run cold. At first he thought that two stoats were fighting on the other side of the stone wall that bounded the field, but as the horrid noise drew near the gap through which he had come not long before, he stood up on his hind legs and looked towards it. Then he saw not two but five stoats come between the stone pillars where a gate had once hung, and knew at a glance it was his trail they were following. The dread of the weasel is so paralysing that some hares—for, like men, all hares have not the same courage—would have crouched on the ground, or dragged their limbs in lessening circles until their fate overtook them; but not so this little Jack. He was away at once at full speed, and the pack of fiends, sighting him as he passed the rubbing-post near the middle of the field, extended themselves at full gallop and, as they seldom fail, when hunting together, to run down their prey, reckoned they would soon be sucking his blood. If the hare had had only the danger behind to fear, his greater speed would soon have enabled him to out-distance his pursuers,

STONE CIRCLE AT BOSCAWEN-UN.

[*Face page* 138.

astoundingly fleet of foot though they are for their size. It was far otherwise; for at every gap, at every gate, he paused and snuffed the air for tainted snare or lurking fox, and this allowed the stoats to lessen the space that would else have separated them. So that it gladdened the Jack's eyes, when he had left the hamlets of Brahan and Crowz-an-Wra behind, to see at last the murky cone of Chapel Cairn Brea rising before him against the scarcely less black sky. Once free of the cultivated land he breasted the hill at his best pace, but on reaching the summit paused near a ruined chantry, to listen. His long ears were pricked to catch the slightest sound that should break the unusual silence.

The night was still as death, as if nature held its breath at witnessing this tragic chase of its own ordering, and before very long the hare heard the weasel-cry coming from the direction where his ascending track lay. At first it fascinated him as it does all his tribe, and he felt inclined to stay and await his fate; but the love of life was too strong within him, and shaking off the paralysing feeling that was numbing his limbs, he set his head in the direction of Bartinney. With his back to the danger, terror seemed to add wings to his feet, and

like the wind he went down the eastern slope of Chapel Cairn Brea until he reached the margin of the Lidden's Pool. Instantly he dashed through the shallows and, losing foothold where the water deepened, swam across it in a slanting direction as he had more than once seen the doe, his mother, do. Having landed, he repeated his usual ruse, and then squatted in a seat in some sedgy growth not a stone's throw from the clump of rushes where he was born. With the sheet of water, which is some fifty yards wide, between him and his pursuers, he believed he was safe. Indeed, it did not much disturb him to hear them coming down the hill, but when he saw them take to the water, on the black surface of which their glowing eyes showed like green beads, he was filled with dismay. They landed near him, for they had swum straight across the pool, and at once, without staying to shake their wet fur, strove to pick up the lost line, two working the margin one way, and three the other. Presently one succeeded, at the spot where the hare had landed, near the extremity of a finger-like creek, and making a cry, called the rest of the pack, which flew to it. Then together they followed the scent through the belt of rushes and over the sable face of the heather, and coming to

the end, spread out like a fan, the while making a chattering noise, and displaying an activity more fiendish than hound-like in their ineffectual attempts to recover it beyond. A stoat which seemed to be the leader, for he it was that came first through the gap and afterwards led the others across the pool, returned on the trail, making short casts on each side of it, and only just failed to find where the hare had landed from his first spring. Wearying at last of his efforts, or fearful of being discovered at daybreak on such a bare expanse of moorland, he uttered a strange cry which summoned the well-disciplined band around him. Less than a minute later the terror-stricken hare, who had watched their every movement, saw the baulked marauders steal away over the shoulder of the hill by a path slightly barer than the ground about it, where a much-used bridle-track had been in the days of pack-mules, before wheels rumbled over the roads that now "ribbon" the countryside.

After this horrible experience it was long before the hare ventured down to the lowlands. Save for an occasional raid on a labourer's garden at the foot of the hill, he contented himself with the less succulent fare of a farm on the barren upland between Bartinney and Caer Bran. The harder life was not

without its compensations. By journeying over the hills in search of food—for at times he would wander far to browse on wild thyme and other tender herbage in sheltered spots of the waste—he got to know his beats as well as the Earthstopper knew every step of the rough ways between the fox-holts. To this knowledge, and to his powers of endurance thus strengthened, he owed his many escapes from greyhounds, which he led by paths that gave him the advantage.

His favourite seat at this time, when persecution had driven him from his old ones, was amongst the sere grasses that grew on an ancient earthwork or "gurgoe" near the summit of Bartinney. In winter-time few bleaker spots can be found than the crest of this Cornish height, to which the scanty herbage clings close like a skull-cap, and on which stonecrop and lichen make nearly as hard a struggle for existence as the hare. Yet for one thing the spot is favoured, inasmuch as it catches the earliest rays of the sun when the slopes are yet grey and the lowlands lie in gloom. This advantage the hare did not fail to utilise. Returning wet from the dew-drenched grasses in the troughs of the hills, he would, before entering his form, stand on the boulder crowning the crest, and

dry his fur as a cormorant dries his wings after fishing.

During the great frost before the blizzard he clung to the hilltop, and lay there under the snow, with just a breathing-hole in the side of his white hut. For three days he fed on the shoots of the furze, but at last, hunger dispelling his fears, he ventured down to a mowhay and had his fill of clover from a stack near a dog-kennel. Fortunately, snow fell that night and hid his tracks, so that he was not followed next morning by poachers, as he had been once before despite the long round he took and the various shifts he resorted to for the purpose of throwing them off his track.

> "The many musets through the which he goes,
> Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes."

In snow, storm, and sunshine, the hare clung to the summit of the upland, and but rarely used the form near the pool. Its solitude and the great silence that brooded over it were almost as sweet to him as life itself. Rarely did anything move across the broad slopes he overlooked save the fleeting shadows of the clouds. All the summer through but one man came up the hill—an aged botanist he was, of world-wide fame—who more than once toiled to the top, and the hare got accustomed to the

gleam of his big spectacles and the flapping of his long coat-tails, and somehow knew that he was harmless, though his eyes, like those of the men who had sought him with dogs, were always on the ground.

On the dry bank, with the thick grasses to screen him from the hot rays and the sea breezes to fan him, he would sleep through the noontide heat when the lizard left the sparse brake to bask in the sun, and "king-crowner" butterflies flitted above the crest, or settled on the outcropping rocks to open and close their gorgeous wings though there was no eye to admire their beauty. In these neighbours the hare had nothing to fear, nor in the kestrel that hovered over the hill, nor now, in the raven that winged its way high overhead as it crossed from the northern to the southern cliffs.

This happy time lasted until the splendour of the dwarf furze faded, and chill October stripped the storm-bent thorns of foliage; with the advent of the black month (as the ancient Cornish styled November) it came to an end, and the hare was called upon to bear the greatest trial of his life.

## CHAPTER XII

### The Hare—*Continued*

#### DIGORY STROUT AND FARMER PENDRE

About this time there returned to St Just a native of the parish who had made his fortune in the Far West of America. He was brought up as a miner, but the discovery that enriched him was really due to his love of sport. For, tiring of work in a copper-mine, he took to trapping and big game shooting, and one day in following the trail of a grizzly in a remote gully, lit on a shallow creek containing gold. The claim is worked out now; but in some maps of the States you will see, near the Canadian frontier, a small river marked Digory's Creek. Amongst the cottonwood and spruce trees near its source, in the heart of the Great Divide, the hunter built a log-cabin, hung up his traps, tethered his favourite mare and pack-horse, and devoted his whole energies to "panning out" the gold from

the sand. His fortune made, he returned after a long absence to England, settled for a year in Lancashire and attended coursing-meetings all over the country. It was on his native downs that he had first seen a course, and it may be that the sight of a hare before greyhounds kindled old memories, for Digory Strout frequently found himself thinking about his native village and the wild moorland that runs up to it. At last a longing to see the old place got so strong a hold on him that he resolved to yield to it and pay a flying visit to West Cornwall. It was towards the close of a September day that the carriage which had brought him from Penzance reached the high ground above New Bridge, overlooking the scene he remembered so well. To the West, the roofs of St Just Churchtown were outlined against the bright sea; and to the North, grim and unchanged, old Cairn Kenidzhek crowned the bleak moorland and looked down on the lonely farms lying like islands in the waste. Digory gazed on these familiar landmarks with a choking sensation in his throat, and when at length he came in sight of the row of grey cottages where he was born, his eyes filled with tears. The people of St Just who remembered him when he set out as a youth, welcomed him warmly, and he resolved to

spend the winter among them. His decision made, he sent for a famous greyhound he had bought, that he might enjoy a few days' coursing during his stay.

The arrival of the greyhound was an event in the dull life of the parish, and the reason for the interest it aroused is not far to seek. The St Just men, the best of judges on a rich lode of tin and the points of a greyhound, had no sooner cast eyes on Digory's dog than they recognised what a perfect creature she was. Such a greyhound had never been seen in West Cornwall before; and when it leaked out, as somehow it very soon did, that she had won the Liverpool Cup and had cost Digory Strout a thousand guineas, the St Just men were all agog that a challenge should be sent then and there to Farmer Pendre of Selena Moor, whose famous dog, Beeswing, had carried everything before it the previous season, and turned the heads of the men of Buryan. No doubt a coursing-match might have been amicably arranged by the owners, but unfortunately some of the miners let fall certain taunts which reached the ears of their rivals and stung them into a state of fury. Thus old enmities were aroused, the two parishes became once more involved in a feud, and Farmer Pendre, who

was a hot-headed man, singled out Strout as his enemy. Digory drove about the countryside apparently unconcerned, but the feeling between the parishes grew worse and worse; and the constable at Buryan, foreseeing a fray and being anxious to take part in it, sent in his resignation. Matters soon came to a head. A fortnight after the arrival of Fleetfoot, as the greyhound was named, a fight took place inside the Quaker's burial-ground between a St Just man from Dowran and a Buryan man from Crowz-an-Wra, and the St Just man got badly beaten.

This was a spark that threatened to set the inflammable material of the two parishes in a blaze; and no one knew this better than the manager of Balleswidden mine, who, as soon as he heard the result of the fight, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and went and saw the parson. What happened in the study at the back of the rectory is not known; but, at all events, Parson Grose was seen galloping through the Churchtown before nine o'clock the next morning, and somehow everyone knew that he was on his way to Buryan. When he reached the high ground near Chapel Cairn Brea and could see the road below him, there, to his surprise, was Canon Roulson on his white horse

coming uphill on his way to St Just. They met where the parishes meet, and by the boundary-stone they discussed the best means for allaying the animosities of their parishioners.

In the end Parson Grose proposed that Farmer Pendre should send a challenge to Mr Digory Strout, and Canon Roulson as vehemently proposed that Mr Digory Strout should send a challenge to Farmer Pendre. Each advocated the cause of his own parish with great warmth, speaking louder and louder, until Parson Grose noticed a man who was ploughing two fields away stop his team to listen, and then he gave in, certain that the canon would have his own way, if they argued till doomsday. Their interview over, the good parsons mounted their dobbins and galloped home, only to find that Digory and Pendre had gone to Penzance, for it was market-day there. The rivals met at the junction of the St Just and Land's End roads, and what must they do, after looking daggers at one another, but race all the way to the Western Hotel? In Penzance they moved about the streets until dinner-time with a supporter on each side, and farmers, foreseeing an outburst at the ordinary, flocked to the "Western" in such numbers that sitting-room was hard to find. A chair, however, at one end of the long table was re-

served for Digory, who was two minutes late. Strout was the coolest man in the crowded room, and seemed to be enjoying the beefsteak-pie, for he had a second helping; but Farmer Pendre, who sat facing him, spent the time in watching his rival from behind a huge rump of beef. The general conversation, which was fitful from the start, became hushed when the cheese came on, and Digory, who spoke in his ordinary voice, could be clearly heard at the end of the room. As he happened to make some casual remark in which the words "best dog" occurred, up jumped Farmer Pendre and in loud, excited tones exclaimed, "Ef you want to find the best dog, you must look for et outside St Just."

In the dead silence which followed, all eyes were fixed on Digory, and the waiters moved about on tiptoe. Digory sat turning over Farmer Pendre's heated words during twenty seconds, which seemed like twenty minutes to the company, then standing up he said, "I hope I do not misinterpret the drift of Mr Pendre's remark. If he means it for a challenge, I accept it. I am willing that my dog shall run against his on Feasten Monday for any stakes he likes to name." The emphatic manner in which the company brought their glasses down on the table, making the spoons ring again, showed they

SANCREED CHURCHTOWN.

[*Face page* 150.

approved of Digory's challenge, which had been uttered in a voice that betrayed no sign of passion.

"I accept your challenge, Mr Strout," said Farmer Pendre, knocking over his neighbour's toddy as he jumped up, "and will back my dog against yours for £50, even money; and if you're willin', we'll meet in Sancreed Churchtown at ten o'clock on the morning you name."

The diamond of Digory's ring flashed as he waved his hand in assent, and immediately the buzz of conversation around the table became deafening. Thus was the match arranged, and a safety-valve provided for the pent-up animosity of two parishes which neither hurling nor wrestling had ever roused to so dangerous a pitch. Before ten o'clock that night it was known in every hamlet in the "West Country" that Pendre's challenge—for so it was put—had been accepted. In the interval between the Thursday and Feasten Monday the subject of coursing was in everybody's mouth, and people were surprised that neither Canon Roulson nor Parson Grose referred to it in their sermons on Sunday evening.

## CHAPTER XIII

### The Hare—*Continued*

#### THE COURSE

At last the looked-for day—the third of November—arrived, and fortunately it broke fine, without sign of mist or fog. Not that any weather, however bad, would have kept away the keen men who from all the parishes around were making towards Sancreed. From St Levan, Sennen, Morvah, Madron, Zennor, Paul, Gulval, they came in goodly numbers, to say nothing of Buryan and St Just, till not only the town-place—the square in front of the Bird-in-hand—but also the roadway that skirts the high churchyard wall were filled with a more excited throng than ever gathered there in olden days to witness a miracle play.

By the dial on the church-porch it was ten o'clock when Digory Strout, accompanied by two friends, drove down the "Beacon" road into the

town-place. He raised his black billycock hat and stood bareheaded for a moment, in acknowledgment of the cheers of his supporters. He was well dressed ; and his brown velvet waistcoat emphasised the rich yellow of the watch-chain, made out of the first nuggets he had found in his creek. He wore a big moustache, otherwise he was clean-shaven, save for the tuft of hair on his under lip, which, with his sallow complexion, gave him a far-travelled look. Everyone but Farmer Pendre was now present, and whilst men were speculating why he was so late, the penetrating notes of a horn were heard above the din, and shortly after the crowd fell back on either side as his tandem dashed up the road into the Square.

Pendre, whose Sunday-best suit was set off by a brand-new white hat and crimson neck-tie, created a favourable impression by the smart way he handled the two chestnuts ; but it was the fawn-coloured greyhound, arrayed in a green coat on which fifteen balls had been worked in yellow silk, that fixed the gaze of the St Just men. He carried himself as if conscious that all eyes were on him, and no one could deny that he was a grand dog, or that his head, perfectly set as it was on his graceful neck, was a collection of good points.

The rousing cheer that rose from the throats

of the Buryan men was tauntingly answered by the St Just men crowding the upper half of the Square; but at the moment when things threatened a fray, the venerable parson, who had been standing under the trees near his gate, walked across between the hostile ranks, and shook hands with each of the owners. This well-timed act was not without its sobering effect on the crowd; but it was remarked that Strout and Pendre did not exchange any form of greeting, though they stood side by side on the broad granite flagstone before the inn door.

No time was lost in making the necessary arrangements. Five men were chosen on each side to find a hare, and a great compliment it was deemed to be one of them. The places of honour at the ends of the line were assigned to Matthey Thomas of St Just Churchtown and Bethias Wallace of Buryan. The ten were driven to Chapel Cairn Brea; the slipper followed with the greyhounds; and close behind rode Mr Heber, the well-known judge, who had come straight from the great meeting at Amesbury. It had been decided to search Cairn Brea, Bartinney, Caer Bran, and the Beacon, in the order named, and a more picturesque setting for the day's sport could not have been chosen. Nowhere has nature fixed more graceful curves against the

sky than those presented by the undulating outline of these last four of the Cornish heights. Let the reader imagine four cones, with bases wide for their height, forming a row parallel to the length of a table on which they are placed. He will then have a rude representation in miniature of the conformation of the country, washed on three sides by the sea, which the hills overlook.

The top of Bartinney was soon crowded with spectators, so too were the old earthworks on Caer Bran, and a big crowd followed the beaters. These were extended in a line on the western slope of Cairn Brea, and working the ground in front of them as they advanced up the hill was Ben Corin's harrier Tuneful, a dog reputed to have the best nose in the nine parishes. The slipper held the greyhounds in a leash in the middle of the line, and the judge rode a little on one side to the rear. Of the crowd on Bartinney that eagerly awaited their appearance on the hill-crest, Parson Grose was perhaps the only one who turned his thoughts from the sport to scan the tableland, so rich in vestiges of the past, which lay spread out like a map some four hundred feet below. To him it was the forlorn refuge of the ancient Celt, a scene of the early Church's activity, a land of legend and romance.

The old antiquary's eyes wandered from the grey towers of the mediæval churches to the site of holy well and ruined baptistery, wayside cross and sanctuary, monolith and stone circle, cromlech and cave-dwelling. Once indeed he raised his eyes from the narrow promontory to the far western horizon, where a broken line, dimly discernible, marked the position of the Isles of Scilly. But his attention was soon recalled by a murmur that ran through the crowd gathered round Digory, at the sight of the judge on horseback and the beaters as they showed on the skyline before descending the eastern slope. Stunted furze and heather, with here and there a patch of golden bracken, clothe the sides of the hills, and the Lidden's pool, encircled by rushes and sere grasses, gleams in the trough below them. On reaching the sheet of water the St Just men take to the left, the Buryan men to the right, and with the latter go the slipper, in charge of the dogs, and the judge. Scarcely have they separated when Bethias 'pricks' a hare; again its track is seen by a Buryan man, and simultaneously on the other side of the pool the harrier begins to feather on a line, and once she throws her tongue. Every clump of rushes, every patch of coarse grass, is carefully searched; and just as every one begins to fear that the hare has passed

Chapel St Uny Well.

[*Face page* 156.

over the hill, from the extreme left of the St Just line comes the almost whispered exclamation, "See-ho!" It is Matthey Thomas who has viewed the hare where she sits some twenty yards ahead, and instantly withdrawn his gaze.

The line stops; the judge, slipper, and dogs come round, pass through the excited crowd, and join Matthey, who points out the hare, or rather the spot where she is lying, for he alone can see her. He is then directed to start her, and with him go the judge and the slipper. When they are within five yards of the form, out goes the little Jack, his head set in the direction of Bartinney. The greyhounds strain at the leash, dragging the slipper with them, but not until the hare has forty yards' start does the judge give the word to loose them. Like arrows released from the bow, they are off, and every eye is on them. Seldom if ever has a more exciting course been witnessed.

At first the greyhounds gain on the hare, but the rising ground to which he is leading them is in his favour, for there at almost every bound his pursuers sink into the stunted furze skirting the narrow "run" he knows so well.

Near the top of the hill better foothold enables them to hold their own, but they do not regain an

inch of the ground they have lost. At amazing speed the hare passes the crowd on Bartinney a good thirty yards ahead of the greyhounds, and takes to the eastern slope. So far not a point has been scored by either dog, but near the foot of the hill Fleetfoot turns the hare, and then it looks as though Beeswing must kill. Scarcely ten yards separate greyhound and hare as they sweep across the two furlongs of flat ground that runs up to the moorland farm over which the Jack has so often wandered. A sudden turn lets in Fleetfoot, and the greyhounds are dead level, with the hare just in front of them, when a hundred yards from the gate for which he is heading. Surely he will never reach it . . . yes, for the greyhounds are jumping the gate as he passes underneath, and even as they are in mid-air he doubles back under it and follows the cattle-track skirting the boundary-wall of the farm. When the dogs view him again, he is at least thirty yards to the good once more, and heading for Caer Bran. Gradually they reduce his lead, and beyond an open stretch of turf, where, to the surprise of the judge, Beeswing had given Fleetfoot the go-by, points are scored by both dogs ; and then a wilderness of pits and mounds receives the hare just in time to save him from Beeswing's jaws.

At headlong speed he threads this maze just in front of the greyhounds, making the air hum as he dashes along the rough ways.

On issuing from it the hare turns suddenly to the left, and skirts some furze-bushes that screen him from the gaze of the dogs. See! they have lost him, but the high springs they are taking will enable them to sight him the instant he leaves the shelter of the last furze-bush. Yes, they view him at once; and the course is resumed under the eyes of the spectators on Caer Bran. To them, in spite of the twenty yards he has gained, it seems impossible for the Jack to reach the Beacon, for which he is now evidently making. Moreover, the steep lane he takes to, in full view of the greyhounds, is all in their favour and, rapid as is the pace of the hare, the leaps of the greyhounds are bringing them close to his scut. They are running neck and neck, and almost mouthing him.

At this critical moment he rushes through a bolt-hole in a single-stone wall, in clearing which the greyhounds show again in the air together. He keeps to the rough grass-field on the other side until they are nearly on him, and then, as suddenly as before, passes through another

opening in the wall, crosses the lane, and threads some scattered furze-bushes on a narrow strip of common that lies at the foot of Sancreed Beacon. Whether the greyhounds were exhausted by the long course, or whether they lost sight of the hare, is not certain; at all events they were found in a very distressed condition, lying side by side on a patch of grass amongst the furze, and the little Jack got clear away.

"Bravo, puss!" were the judge's words, as he followed the hare with his eyes as far as the little plantation of storm-bent pines half-way up the hill. Mr Heber was not the last to view him, for Uncle Johnnie Lairdner, the sexton, was on the Beacon when the hare passed over it, and has left it on record that though the Jack was black with sweat, no sign of arch in his back could he see, and he was goin' like a ball.

The greyhounds were at once taken to Sancreed Churchtown; and thither the spectators hurried, across croft and field, every one anxious to know which dog was adjudged the victor. The excitement in the town-place baffles description. The St Just men would have it that their dog had won, and of these no one was more conspicuous than was he whose eyes yet showed traces of the fight. The

Buryan men were not quite so confident, though they knew that their dog had never run better. Some noticed, after the rivals had exchanged a few words with the judge, that Digory looked disappointed and Pendre jubilant; but this was set down to difference of temperament, and not until at last the judge spoke, did the impatient crowd know the result of the course.

Standing in a wagonette between the owners, this—and here let me thank the Editor of the *Land's End Courier* for a copy of the speech—is what Mr Heber said:—

"Gentlemen, I have judged at many meetings, but never at one where so great an interest has been taken in a single course. You may tell me that this is the result of parish rivalry, but I strongly suspect that at the bottom of it lies that love of sport which characterises no Englishman more than a Cornishman, and no Cornishman more than a native of St Just." His voice was feeble for so big a man, but now it sank almost to a whisper.

"I can tell by your breathless attention that you are anxious to know which dog I judge the winner of the stakes. That my decision will be loyally accepted by loser as by winner I have not a shadow of a doubt." In the pause which followed, the cock

in the glebe farm crowed. "Gentleman, I have never had a more difficult course to adjudicate on ; I have never seen two better dogs run side by side, I may say, neck to neck. One of the greyhounds is already famous, having won the blue ribbon of the Leash ; the other, a dog of pure Cornish breed, is known as the Champion of Cornwall. There is little to choose between these two wonderful dogs ; but there is a difference, if slight, on to-day's form, and I declare Beeswing the winner by a single point."

The applause, renewed again and again by nearly all except the St Just men, was deafening : it scared the jackdaws away from the church tower. It was a trying few minutes for the losers, who stared at the elated winners with angry eyes, their fists clenched, and their faces white. They might indeed have come to blows if Digory had not spoken ; but if the St Just men were resolved to break the peace the following speech averted a collision.

"Fellow Cornishmen, I little thought when bidding farewell to the men of my claim that the next occasion on which I should address an assembly would be in Sancreed Churchtown. Silence is golden, they say ; but to-day's proceedings will, in my opinion, be all the better for being rounded off with

a few words of conciliation. First, let me thank Mr Heber for coming all this way to act as judge. No more competent man could have been chosen; and though his verdict is against my dog, I accept it without demur, and frankly own that to-day Fleetfoot was beaten! Mr Pendre," said he, turning to the farmer, whose white hat was tilted on the back of his head, "I congratulate you on your success. I own that I never thought your dog would be a match for the winner of the Cup; but believe me, though I confess to being disappointed, 'nip and tuck' race though it was, I find some consolation in the fact that it was by a dog of pure Cornish pedigree that Fleetfoot was beaten.

"One other thing, gentleman, let us not forget the wonderful staying power of that little Jack, which practically ran both dogs to a standstill." (Hear, hear, from the judge.)

"The only fault to be found with Cornish hares is, that there are too few of them. In furtherance of sport in general as well as for my own pleasure, I purpose, if the farmers do not object, releasing a hundred hares on the waste land between Mulfra and Kenidzhek. If I settle down at home, I should like to be able to calculate on our having a good day's coursing together. Some people who have

never been abroad wonder that I do not return to the Far West. My answer is, 'a hare on our own downses means more to me than a bear on a furrin' range.' (Great applause.) I do not know that I have anything further to add than to ask Mr Pendre to shake hands with the loser."

Now, after the hard things that had been said about Digory, this was considered very handsome on his part; so that even the Buryan men, whilst emotion swayed them, felt sorry that he had lost, and after the rivals had shaken hands amidst thundering applause the Buryan men kept crying, "Pendre, Pendre," till the farmer, though unused to any meeting bigger than an Easter Vestry or Balleswidden "account," felt that, all "mizy-mazy" as his brain was, he must say something.

"Gentlemen, I never felt so flambustered in all my born days. I'm no orator like Mr Strout, but I also should like to thank the judge for his day's work. Gentlemen, what's the use of saying to the contrary when you don't feel it? I'm glad that Beeswing won, and it's downright honest truth, though I say it (great laughter) . . . I couldn't have lost and not showed it, like Mr Strout. Maybe that comes of travellin' in furrin' paarts, for I've never been out of sight of Buryan tower for a whole

day in my life. Now let me tell ee somethin'. It is not the furst, it's not the second time that Beeswing has coused that leel Jack ; and I knawed un the minit he jumped up by a whitey mark on the niddick. In conclusion, let me tell ee to your face, Mr Strout, that you're a sportsman ; and if I've shawed ee any ill feelin', and I fear I have, I ask ee to overlook it. I wish ee well, and every St Just man godspeed." (Applause.)

Thus amicably ended that day's coursing match, which is now a tradition, its minutest details accurately passed on by the farmers in the chimney-corners of the West Country.

Digory was as good as his word ; and in the following June a consignment of a hundred and fifteen hares arrived at Penzance from Salisbury Plain. These were set free on Bartinney, Mulfra, the Galver, Kenidzhek and the Dry Cairn, and for some years afterwards the country was well stocked.

Unfortunately the conditions of existence have proved too hard for them, and little by little they have had to yield in the struggle against their many enemies, until to-day a hare is as scarce in the Land's End district as when Digory returned home from the Rocky Mountains. Nevertheless, a few hardy

survivors are still found on the hills; and when, as generally happens, the hare outruns the dogs—descendants perhaps of Beeswing and Fleetfoot—the disappointed sportsman attributes its escape, not to witchcraft, but to stamina derived from the strain of the little Jack of Bartinney.

ZENNOR CHURCHTOWN.

[*Face page* 166.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A MIDNIGHT VISIT TO THE SEAL-CAVES

The wildest of British wild sports is the pursuit of the seal in the almost inaccessible cliff-caves to which it at times resorts. Of its haunts along the north coast of Cornwall—it is but rarely seen on the south—from the Land's End to Tintagel, the caverns of Hell's Bay are perhaps those which it most frequents. More secluded or safer fastnesses it would be difficult to imagine, yet in these it may be surprised by those who do not shrink from the peril the pursuit involves. The nearest homestead to the Black Cliffs, as those skirting Hell's Bay are named, is Reskageage; and to its occupant, Mr N., who has led many expeditions against the seals, I owed the opportunity of sharing a bit of sport the wildness of which it is beyond my power to declare.

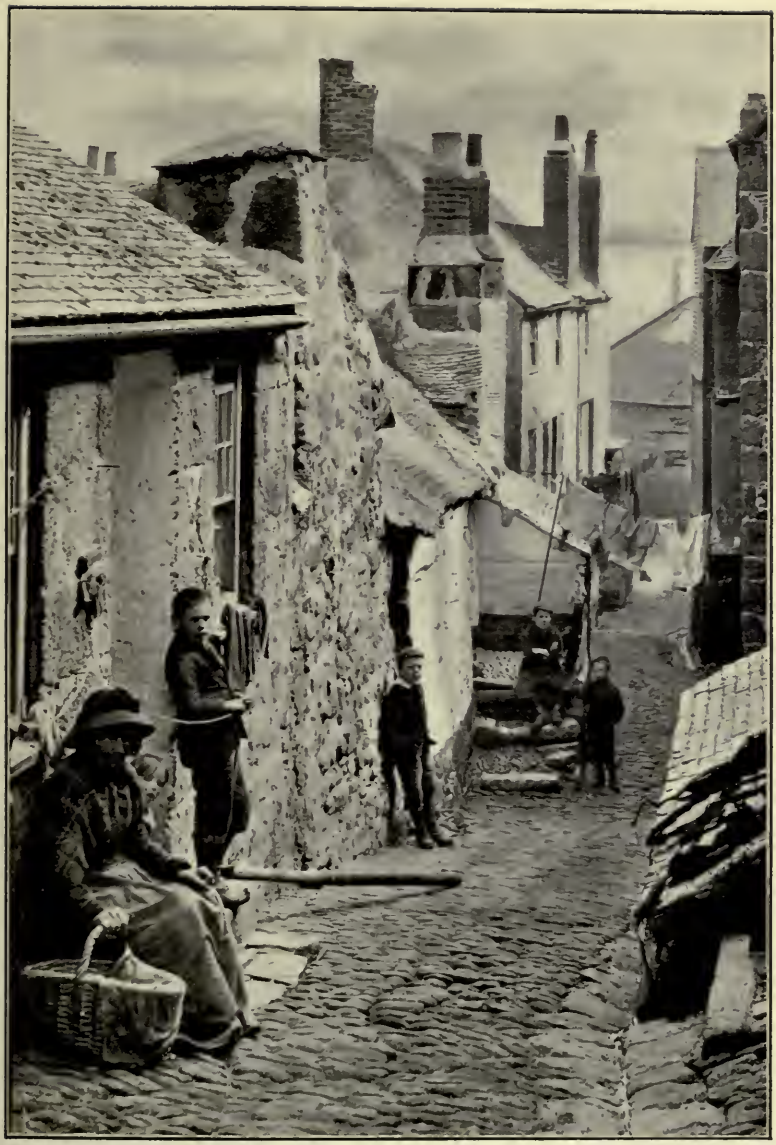
He had promised to send me word when circum-

stances seemed favourable to our purpose, and one morning towards the end of September 189–, whilst staying at St Ives, I received the following message from him:—"Come if possible to-morrow (Thursday) afternoon. I have just seen three seals under the cliffs, and the chances are we shall find some in the caves, as they have not been disturbed for a long time. One of the light-keepers of Godrevy tells me that he has not seen so many playing about the reef for years. If you sail across the bay and the water is smooth, land on the north side of the Red River."

After sending a wire that I should come without fail, I made arrangements with a boatman to take me across the bay. It was close on three o'clock the following afternoon when we rounded the pier head and set the bow of our little craft for Gwithian beach. A fair wind filled the brown sail and drove us at a merry pace over the waves of this loveliest of bays, where the Cornish sea displays its vividest hues in a setting of silver sand. Landing was practicable, and the boat was beached near where my friend was awaiting me on the shore.

"You're rather late," said he, as we shook hands.

"Well now, you had better go and have a good



A Street at St Ives.

[*Face page* 108.

look at the cliffs whilst it's light. You'll see where I've been whitewashing the rocks. Get the twists and turns of the way down fixed in your mind: that will be helpful later on. In the meanwhile I'm going to overhaul the whole of the gear."

I took the direction he indicated and, stepping out briskly across the intervening neck of rising ground between the two bays, soon reached the dizzy edge of the cliffs. A little on my left hand, zigzagging down the steep descent and almost to the edge of the foam, lay a white dotted line that was to guide us in the darkness. The mouths of the caves—there are four—frequented by the seals were some two or three hundred feet below me, but I could not see them.

Bleak and lone are these Gwithian cliffs, merciless the winds that sweep them. Not a tree or a bush is to be seen, and even the heather is stunted. No note of songbird meets the ear, nor scream of seafowl, only the sullen boom of the Atlantic ground-swell in the caves so far below. Along the coast towards Newquay sunlit headlands stretched out into the ocean; and the low promontory of Trevose, dim and unsubstantial-looking, lay on the far horizon. The mellow rays of the sun now and again caught the snow-white plumage of some bird along the

coast, and lit up the surf at the foot of the distant cliffs.

Not a gull floated over the bay below me; but a string of cormorants, with black flight, skimmed the heaving surface just beyond the dark shadow of the coastline, and disappeared round a jagged point.

I was following the last of these birds with my eyes, when my gaze was arrested by the appearance of a seal below me, and as far as I could judge, not twenty yards from the mouth of one of the caves. It carried its head, which looked as black as jet, clear of the surface, and betrayed not the least sign of alarm. After about a minute it sank—it did not dive—out of sight. I remained watching, in the hope that the quaint-looking creature would show itself again; but, as it gave no sign and the sun was nearing the horizon, I left the cliff and made my way across the heather and stubble to Reskageage.

I found my friend in the barn. The light of a candle stuck against the wall fell on the sun-browned faces of the farmhands, who watched him as he overhauled the equipment for our expedition. The various details were displayed on the lid of a big wooden chest that had once held

the tin-ore between "ticketing" days at Wheal Margy. There lay some dozen torches, consisting of small branches of elm, about three feet in length, with pieces of white rag wound round one end and secured by bits of string; three small bottles containing oil, a rather heavy hammer with a new haft about three and a half feet long, a powerful gaff, a long-bladed knife, a revolver and cartridges. Near a big coil of rope was a sack of very bulky appearance, which somewhat excited my curiosity. Undoing the string round the neck of it, my friend drew out a rope-ladder ten inches in width and between fifty and sixty feet long. The rungs were of iron, about three-eighths of an inch in diameter, and perhaps fourteen inches apart. The strength of the ladder had previously been tried by the tug-of-war test, but now my host carefully examined the rope where it passed through eyes in the rungs, to make sure that it had not been weakened by friction or by rust. No defects being found, the free ends of the ropes were tied together, forming a triangle with the top rung; and the ladder was again stowed away in the sack. The big coil of rope was next overhauled. It was knotted at intervals of about three feet.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"We keep that up in the adit, in case anything goes wrong with the ladder."

"And the knots?"

"They make swarming up easier."

A vague idea of the mode of approach and of egress from the cave began to dawn upon me. "There's only one way out?" I inquired.

"By the adit is the only way, unless you swim for it before the tide covers the mouth of the cave."

"There's some ledge out of reach of the tide, where you can wait till it falls?"

"No, there's scarcely foothold for a shag or a cliff-owl on the walls of the big cave."

I confess to feeling slightly unnerved at the prospect, the perilous character of which was now evident. However, I meant going through with the business, which was of my own inviting; but though I had the utmost confidence in my friend, it seemed to me it would be safer, in the event of accidents, that three rather than two should descend into the "big cave," as he had called it. It is trying enough to a novice to be let down over a cliff in broad daylight to reach a peregrine's or raven's nest, but I could see that was nothing in comparison with the night expedition before me. In the circumstances, it is natural that the idea of sending for the

Earthstopper should have occurred to me. Not only was he accustomed to the cliffs at night, but he was of firm nerve and of ready resource. I lost no time in suggesting it; already I feared it was too late.

"Very well," replied my friend, "in case of accident — not that I expect any, mind you — we couldn't have a better man. Fill in a form—you will find some on my table—and Tom there shall take it at once. There isn't a moment to lose."

A few minutes later the lad was cantering down the lane between the sand-dunes with this message: "Be here by midnight. Ride or drive. Seal hunt between twelve and one. T——, Reskageage, Gwithian."

My friend was extinguishing one of the torches as I re-entered the barn. Evidently he was not content until he had tested everything, even the oil. I could not but remark to him on the extreme care of his preparations.

"I like to see to every detail myself in a ticklish job of this sort," he said, as he laid the torch down by the side of the gaff: "a weak spot in the rope, a flaw in the haft of the hammer, bad cartridges or wet matches, may mean more than spoiled sport."

Leaving the barn, we made our way across the rickyard to the house.

A cold wind was rustling the leaves of the wind-clipt elm that had supplied handles for our torches; and, as the air was chilly, I was glad to get indoors. After supper we withdrew into my friend's sanctum and pulled our chairs up to the furze fire which blazed on the wide hearth. Cases of rare birds and curious relics hung against the walls, and the floor was covered with sealskins.

In reply to some questions about the seals, my host told me it was an old man that spent most of his time about the cliffs, egg-collecting, and looking for things cast up by the sea, who had first called his attention to them. This had led to his finding a way to the caves—for the secret had died with the smugglers who used them—and eventually to the animals themselves. The greatest number of seals he had killed at one time was seven, he said, and the heaviest carcase would weigh five or six hundredweight. His opinion was that at least some of the seals remain on the coast all the year round, and that they do not go far out to sea to fish. They fed chiefly on the herring, but he had seen one rise in Hell's Bay with a big flat-fish of some sort, probably a turbot, writhing in its

mouth. Then, suddenly jumping up in the middle of an explanation why the eye of the seal is big and the otter's small—"He's coming," said he.

We went to the garden gate and looked down the road and, sure enough, a light was coming towards us.

"How on earth did you know he was close at hand?" I asked in surprise. "You didn't hear anything, did you?"

"No, I did not hear the horse neigh nor the sound of its hoofs, for they fell and are still falling on sand; but the dog must have heard, for I noticed him prick his ears and listen. You see, Andrew's time was all but up; and, putting the two together, I didn't hesitate to say he was coming."

More and more distinct grew the light; then we heard the thud of hoofs where the track is clear of sand; and at last Andrew, seated on a rough pony, and holding the lantern in his left hand, emerged from the darkness.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I was afeerd I was too late, though I've shogged on as fast as I could."

The old shepherd having taken charge of the steaming pony, we soon had the Earthstopper before the furze fire.

"That looks cheerful after the black night, tho' et do make ee blink like a cat at fust."

"You've had a lonely ride, Andrew?"

"No, sir, I'm never lonely, unless maybe when stopping the Land's End cliffs on a wild night. Why, Lelant flats was all alive with curleys and sea-birds as I crossed the Caunsway. Niver heerd such whistlin' in all my born days. Et must be gettin' on for low water."

"Well now, drink up that glass of toddy and we'll be on the move. It's half an hour to low water, and it's time we were on our way."

Whilst my friend was saying this, I looked at the hands of the clock in the corner. It was seven minutes past twelve. Our equipment having been divided among us, we set out across the fields for the cliffs.

"We've forgotten the sack," I said, as we crossed the stubble.

"That's all right," replied my friend.

It was indeed a black night, as the Earthstopper had remarked. A great bank of cloud hung like a curtain before the western heaven, and shut out the light of half the stars. On our left Godrevy shot out its warning beams at regular intervals, and far away up channel Trevose light shone bravely in the

gloom. The keen, salt wind blew straight in our faces as we breasted the high ground near the sea. By-and-by the sullen roar which reached our ears made us cautious, for we had neared the edge of the cliff; and, when we had roped ourselves together, our guide took the lead and we began the steep descent.

The otter excepted, there is no more wary animal than the seal; so we climbed down past the stones, ghost-like in their white shrouds, as noiselessly as possible, and at length arrived at the foot of the cliff. There was no beach, only huge wet boulders, between which the tide gurgled. We had scrambled—it was rough going—some distance over these rocks before I felt a pull on the rope, and then, peering through the darkness, I saw that our guide was standing at the entrance to a tunnel that proved to be the way into the seals' cave, the mouth of which is unapproachable except by boat. Here we met with an unexpected impediment. The mast of a ship had got wedged into the passage, leaving only a narrow space between its splintered surface and the rocky walls.

"Hand over your lantern, Andrew," said my friend, as he struck a match on his trousers.

"It's all right," said he, holding the light against the mouth of the tunnel; "I think we can get through.

Now, undo the rope, and follow me as quiet as mice. You've got the hammer, Andrew?"

"Yes."

This in whispers; and then we squeezed through the cramped space. The passage was some five feet in height and four in breadth. The floor was very irregular, and covered with water lying in pools of varying depths. At the further side of a deep pool our guide paused, and held a light over the water. This enabled me to avoid the holes between the loose rocks at the bottom, and I managed to get through by wading thigh-deep. The old Earthstopper in his fur cap and velveteen coat followed, trying the depth with the long, white haft of the hammer he carried. I noticed that he left the water as noiselessly as an otter would have done. The increasing noise of the waves warned us as we progressed along the tunnel, that we were getting near the seals' retreat. In the great cave in which we soon stood, the roaring at its mouth and the reverberations within produced a noise that was deafening. Three torches were lit; and we advanced over some loose rocks and shingle to a shelving bed of white sand, on which the seals are generally found. Down this, when surprised, they shuffle to face their enemies and meet death. It was disappointing to find none at home.

HELL'S BAY.

[*Face page* 178.

We then proceeded to explore the inmost recesses, to reach which we had to scramble on all fours between the descending roof and the ascending floor of the cave. In one of these, that reminded me of a chapel in Westminster Abbey, was a baby seal, which, judging from its plaintive bleats, seemed to know the danger it was in. It was about a foot and a half long, of a creamy colour, with big, pleading eyes. Leaving the little creature we returned to the rocky part of the floor, and held the torches high above our heads to try to illuminate the cave. We could see the great walls of rock for perhaps twenty or thirty feet, but the light failed to scatter the gloom which ever shrouds the lofty roof. Here and there in these darker heights projections of rock were dimly visible, looking like spectral faces craned forward to peer at us. It was a weird scene that this great, resounding ocean-hall presented, and one that haunts the memory. There is little wonder that legends and superstitions cluster round these caves.

"Come," said our guide, "there's no time to be lost," and in a few minutes we were again scrambling between the mast and the rock. I was glad to get a glimpse of the stars again. Out at sea, I could discern the light of some vessel going up towards

the Bristol Channel. As I climbed the dusky cliff-side on the heels of our guide, and with Andrew behind me, I tried to brace my nerves for the ordeal that lay before us. The approach to the cave for which we were making is fraught with peril. Few attempt it, and of those few scarce one makes the descent a second time. This cave is the securest stronghold of the seals along the wild coast of Cornwall.

We might have made our way up some seventy feet when the guide struck a rude track on the cliff-side, and this we followed until the light of the lantern fell on the old shepherd sitting with the sack containing the rope-ladder. We had arrived at the entrance to the adit for which we were making, and along this we all proceeded in single file. It was a strange way of reaching a cave the mouth of which lay sixty feet below. We had not advanced thirty yards before we could hear the hollow roar of the waves.

"Be careful here," said the guide, as he held his torch over a chasm. For some reason, a piece of the partition-wall between the adit and the cave has been destroyed, and with it half the narrow footway. It was a dangerous spot to pass in the lurid, unsteady light; but the shepherd made nothing of it, and as the projecting part of the sack on his back lay over the chasm when he skirted it, he was able to hug the wall

on his right. Some thirty yards farther in, the tunnel pierced the wall of the cave, and again the hollow roar of the sea reached our ears. Whether the adit was driven on a vein of copper is uncertain, but there is no doubt that at one time it was used by smugglers. Kegs of brandy, lace and silk goods were probably taken to the mouth of the cave in boats, and afterwards hauled up to the tunnel and, as opportunity offered, distributed thence over the countryside amongst the smugglers' clients, to wit, the magistrates, landlords, and tenant farmers.

Projecting from the wall of the cave, about a foot above the level of the adit, is a stout iron bar, over which our guide, by leaning forward, placed the end of the ladder so that the ropes which had been knotted together lay on each side of it, in the acute angle between the bar and the wall. The ladder was then dropped in the chasm. Clink, clink, clink —clink—clink. The seals must surely have been startled by the unusual noise made by the iron rungs striking against the rocky wall of their wild retreat. Vain warning! for some of the big boulders which cover part of the floor of the cave are dry at low water, and effectually prevent their escape. Our guide was the first to descend. I followed him into the dark abyss. The descent down the wooden

ladders of a tin-mine is child's play to going down a rope-ladder which lies against a sheer wall. Twice my feet lost grip of the slender staves, and the second time, failing to recover the rung, I had to go down hand over hand to the point where the ladder hung clear of the rock. Here it twisted and turned, adding a little variety to the difficulties of the descent. The Earthstopper, with the hammer slung across his back, followed, coming down hand over hand nearly the whole way.

"That ladder's a rum un!" he shouted in my ear, as we stood on the rock near the foot of it.

Two lighted torches were then fixed in crannies in the walls; and after lighting three others, we moved forward, each holding one in his left hand. Beyond the slippery boulders over which we were creeping, the flare of the torches fell on the heaving surface of a deep, rocky pool.

"Look out!" shouted my friend, "they're in."

We drew a little nearer to the water, now lashed into foam as a seal rushed up and down. Two shots were fired as its glistening head showed above the water, but the only effect as far as I could see was to enrage the creature, and make it more aggressive than at first. For, when it reached our end of the pool again, it threw itself out of the water on to a

rock, where it rested momentarily, looking more like some antediluvian creature sculptured in black marble than a living seal. Then with a hoarse roar it slid down the face of the rock and shuffled towards us in a most menacing manner.

"Stand clear, and don't fire again!" shouted Andrew as he swung the hammer preparatory to delivering a blow. My friend jumped aside; and, as the huge brute came within striking distance, the hammer caught it full on the head and felled it to the ground. A tremor passed over the body; the seal was dead.

Whilst the battle lasted, angry bellowings came from the shelving beach beyond, where other seals —blurred, restless forms—awaited our attack. But wholesale slaughter was not our object; not another shot was fired. I would have liked to get nearer to the herd, but the danger of crossing the pool was too great.

"For God's sake, don't think of it!" shouted my friend; "we'll light more torches." This done, Andrew picked up the one he had laid on the rocks, and we advanced to the edge of the water with a torch in each hand, holding them well up, and forward at full arm's-length. It was the sight of a lifetime. Five huge beasts, two grey, the rest a dirty

yellow, mottled with black spots, lay swaying on the sand, prepared to make a rush—they can shuffle down a slope at a great pace—if we entered the pool; and these were not all, for in dark recesses beyond I saw indistinct forms move, and once I thought I caught the gleam of liquid eyes. For several minutes we stood fascinated by the wild scene, but it behoved us not to linger. Once or twice I noticed my friend turn his face towards the mouth of the cave. In the excitement he had not forgotten that the tide had turned. There was not time to skin the dead seal and remove the blubber; so my friend, who meant coming for this purpose at next low water, went to the foot of the ladder and shouted to the shepherd to throw down the rope. With some difficulty he made himself understood, for the roar of the waves was now greater than ever; and a few moments after the shepherd had shouted "Stand clear!" down came the coil on to the boulders. One end of the rope was tied securely to one of the flippers of the dead seal—a huge beast—and the other round a rock on which a bigger one rested. Andrew and I were taking a last look at the seals when our guide called out that there was no time to lose; and, indeed, the tide was washing the boulders at the foot of the ladder when we got there.

"Take your time, sir," said Andrew as he held the bottom of it, "and higher up, press your knee against the wall, thet'll clear the staave above."

When a third of the way up, I looked towards the inner part of the cave. Profound gloom shrouded it, though the lights still flickered on the walls; and the seals, as far as I could hear, had ceased their angry challenges. Having reached the adit, I held a torch over the chasm to light the Earthstopper in his ascent. When he was near the top of the ladder, I saw that his face was spattered with blood. My friend having also reached the adit, the ladder was hauled up and put into the sack, and we made our way again into the open air. Scarcely a word was said as we climbed the cliff and crossed the heather and stubble to the farmhouse. After a wash and a hurried supper, the Earthstopper attached his lantern to the saddle and rode down the track towards Gwithian Churchtown. I could hear him jogging along until he reached the place where the road lies under feet of driven sand. The black clouds had lifted a little, and Crobben Hill was dimly discernible against the stars.

"Pity we can't have spoart without killin'," were the Earthstopper's words as we had stood near the dead seal, and I thought of them as I turned to go indoors.

## CHAPTER XV

### REMINISCENCES OF BOYHOOD'S DAYS

Snow had fallen heavily during the night, for at daybreak it lay to a depth of several inches on the grass under my window, and weighed down the laurel-bushes that skirted it. It was an unusual sight for a Cornish boy; but more impressive was the hush that had fallen on the world—the noiseless footfall of man and horse and the muffled tones of St Mary's bells, scarcely audible though an east wind was blowing. This impression has never left me, nor have many of the scenes that met my eyes lost their vivid outlines. Despite the effacing influence of time, I can still see clearly against the white background the incidents of that Christmas-tide. One word about the frost. It was sudden as well as severe, so that even the men who watched the skies for change of weather were taken by surprise. The intense cold traversed the island as

fast as the piercing wind that came with it, and between sundown and dawn had laid its icy fetters on the whole country. Thus Penwith for once suffered with the rest of England, and even more severely. Snowdrops had been already gathered in sunny corners, and a quarryman on his way home to Gulval had seen and picked a few primroses in Trevaylor woods, for his sick wife. This became known subsequently, when the gardeners sought excuses for not having bound up the stems of the palm-trees that had till then flourished in the semi-tropical climate. Perhaps it is not strictly correct to say that there was no warning of the frost. Two days before it set in, John Harris, the light-house-keeper, had found a woodcock with a broken bill lying dead on the stage outside the lantern, and near it a rare bird only seen so far west in rigorous winters; and those who took the side of the gardeners said that, had he not kept the secret to himself for fear of the game-laws, not only the palm-trees, but also the old aloe in Alverton Lane that had flowered the previous summer, might have been saved. Whether the woodcock found by the light-house-keeper was one of a big flight or whether the birds arrived a day or so later is uncertain; at all events it was generally known on Christmas Day

that the furze-brakes were "alive with cock," tidings which raised a longing for the morrow in the breast of the sportsmen. Among these was an old friend whom I found busy in his sanctum filling a leathern pouch with shot from a canister. A log was blazing on the hearth. As I talked to him, I noticed that the ruddy blaze was tinged with green. I was puzzled to know the cause at the time, but I have thought since that the colour must have been due to a copper nail in the half-burnt piece of oak. The mention of this recalls how I used to enjoy sitting by that fireside, listening to the yarns of the three sportsmen who foregathered there. Who that ever heard them can forget the incidents of that famous night's sea-fishing at the "Back of the Island"; the capture with the walking-stick rod of the two-pound trout whose holt was the deep pool under the roots of the sycamore at the foot of the hilly field at Trewidden; the vigils in the hut at Trevider fowling-pool; the great take of peal in the trammel at Lamorna Cove, and the finding the same morning of the otter drowned in the crab-pot nearly half a mile seaward from the Bucks? Few sporting tales have appealed to me as did those I overheard there; and, unconsciously, the surroundings may have served to impress me as the setting

of a play impresses the spectator in a theatre. Trophies of the rod and gun mingled with quaint relics of by-gone days, that gave an old-world look to the room. Between cases of stuffed birds and fishes hung pewter jugs, leather bottles, rosaries, and crossbows. Above two sporting prints was a dove-coloured top-hat, with a wide cork band and "Quaker" brim. Few hats could boast such a history as that, but I cannot tell it here. On a shelf, between a bookcase and a corner-cupboard, was the little basket that the woman carried who used to distribute letters in Penzance in the early part of the last century; and below it was a sketch of a contemporary of hers, the famous Joe Pascoe, the one-armed constable, who, according to tradition, was a terror to badger-baiters and cock-fighters, and a match for Boney himself. There, too, was a sketch of Henry Quick, the Zennor peasant-poet, with these lines of his under it:—

> "Ofttimes abroad I take my flight,
> Take pity on poor Henny;
> To sell my books 'tis my delight,
> To gain an honest penny."

Under a coach-horn that had often awakened the echoes of the Cornish hills, were three small cabinets, my friend's own handiwork. The smallest

contained minute shells, carefully classified, which he had collected on Porthcurnow and Gwenvor beaches; but more interesting to me than shells, ferns, or wildflowers, was the collection of birds' eggs. What rare ones some of those compartments held! What trouble my friend had had in securing them! I have often questioned him about his expeditions on the cliffs, but he preferred to dwell on his visits to the outer islands of Scilly. The rugged grandeur of Mincarlo and Menavawr appealed to him; yet Annet was his favourite, and though he was a man of few words and free from gush, I have heard him sigh when a sea-bird's egg, or the lichen or withered thrift it rested on, recalled the beauty of this islet, which, when the sea-pinks are in bloom, glows under the June sun with the brilliant beauty of an amethyst set in sapphire.

The room had one window only; but it was a spacious bay which faced south, and through it you could see and hear the waves breaking on the beach below. More than once that afternoon, before he lit the lamp, my friend turned the spyglass on some companies of wildfowl that dotted the rough water between the "Battery" and Lareggan rocks.

A double-barrelled muzzle-loader—a Joe Manton—was George Bevan's favourite gun; and this, with

NEST OF SEAGULL.

(*Face page* 190.

powder-flasks, shot-pouches, caps and wads, were placed ready for the next morning. Only a boy who has been entered to sport and knows how the anticipation of it fevers the blood, can understand how impatiently I looked forward to the morrow. That night I thought sleep would never come ; and at what hour I fell off I do not know, for the frost had got into the workings of our eight-day clock, and as for the town clock, that could generally be heard the town over, it might have stopped for all the sound it made in striking. But I must have slept, for I was half awakened by some noise against my window. My first impression was that the snow had changed to hail, but as the rattle grew louder I sat up in bed. Then it was I heard, "Jack, get up!" faint and far away, like the doctor's voice when you're coming to after chloroform ; and almost immediately the memory of everything came back to me—my friend's last assurance that he would call for me, the white world outside and, most stirring of all, the woodcock awaiting us in the furze-brakes. I was up in a jiffy, struck a light, and dressed as hurriedly as a fourth-form boy whom the first stroke of the call-over bell finds in bed. The cold had not relented, for a film of ice lay on the water in the jug, and by the candlelight I saw that the window-panes were frosted over. This

was joy to me, for in my troubled sleep I had dreamt that the commonplace world was back again, and that every woodcock had flown away in the train of the retreating frost. Moreover, when we set out, the snow crunched under our feet, and a long icicle was hanging from the stone lip of the Alverton chute. Day was breaking when we reached the hilly field at Rosehill and followed the path under the beech-trees ; and it is there, for some reason I cannot explain, that I best recall my old friend on that day. He was well above the middle height, and strongly built. The gun was slung across his back by means of a leather strap. The coat of heather-mixture he wore had, besides big side-pockets, several subsidiary ones, and there were leather pieces on the shoulders. Two spaniels followed at his heels, and his henchman, an old man who had been in the employ of the family all his life, closed the procession. My friend's hair was silvering, as you could see between the upturned collar and the brim of the dove-coloured hat ; and for that reason he seemed, to my boyish eyes, an old man. Nevertheless I had some difficulty in keeping up with him, especially when, not having mittens on as he had, I put my hands in my pockets to protect them from the biting cold. Yet how slight must have been my discomfort compared to the distress of

the birds—fieldfares, thrushes, whinnards, blackbirds, starlings and missel-thrushes—which were flying hither and thither in the vain search for food. Though no doubt I thought how easily they might be trapped, I was sorry for the smaller birds, wrens and tomtits, that threaded the hedgerow near the farmhouse, and for the robin, puffed out with cold, perched on one leg on the sill of the dairy window. A little farther on, where the footpath crosses the brook near its junction with the Lezingey stream, a snipe rose from some rushes; and farther on again, near some furze-bushes, were tracks of at least one rabbit. But we left them all behind us. The shooting-ground we were making for lay on the southern edge of the "High Country," and though our shortest way would have been along the "Watery Lane," as it used to be called, and up Hendra Bottoms, we rose the steep hill leading to Boswednan. By this more roundabout course, we should avoid the drifts through which a farmhand, who had brought tidings of the woodcock, had been obliged to force his way.

From the high ground above the hamlet, where we halted a moment to take breath, we overlooked a scene which resembled a rude cast in white of the familiar countryside. Many land-

marks were disguised beyond recognition, and the waters of Mount's Bay, generally like a liquid gem of the deepest blue, looked dull as lead. The newly-risen sun loomed big through the frost-fog which its rays could not penetrate, and a man with weak eyes might have stared at the dull crimson orb without blinking. In the hollow immediately below us, an old labourer, with a big faggot of furze on his back, was staggering across a yard, his feet sinking at every step deeper and deeper into the snow, as he made for the closed door of the farmhouse against which it had drifted. It must be admitted that the snowfall, heavy as it was, could not be compared to the great blizzard of later years, which blocked the railway, isolated the dwellers in the country, and but for his knowledge of the position of a starveling tree on the edge of a quarry, would probably have cost the Earthstopper his life. Nevertheless, wildfowl were quite as abundant; and as the Looe Pool, Marazion Marsh, and other resorts became frozen over, they had to shift their quarters, and ultimately to settle on the sea.

More than one skein of duck had passed high overhead since daybreak, flying westward, but none so big as the great flock of widgeon which we saw, some four gunshots above us, as we were turning

ST MICHAEL'S MOUNT.

[*Face page* 194.

into the marshy moor near Tremayne plantation, where our sport was to begin. This piece of undrained ground was, may be is, shaped like a triangle. Tussocks of rushes just showed above the snow, and a runnel, winding in and out among them, ran chattering between a double frill of ice. We had not advanced many steps before a snipe rose, to fall to the first barrel, and soon after a wisp got up out of range, and flew away in the direction of the Big Downs. Following the running water, we approached the corner, where rushes gave place to a brambly thicket, between which and the stone walls behind grew a few gnarled holly-bushes. The spaniels were hardly in this cover before they flushed a woodcock. Bang! bang! and the bird fell on our side of the wall. The smoke had not cleared when another rose from the other side, where a few withes skirted the runnel. It afforded the easiest of shots; but, alas! both barrels were empty, and the reloading of a muzzle-loader takes time. We crouched, hoping the bird might settle in an adjoining marsh, but it kept on in the direction of Trannack Hill till it became a mere speck in the leaden sky, and at last was lost to view.

Separated from the three-cornered moor by two or three rough fields is a stennack—an excavation

made by the "old men" in mining for tin—in length a good stone's throw, and some thirty yards across. The bed of it lies from twelve to twenty feet below the level of the field that circles it, so that the biting wind swept over the white coverlet that concealed the close thicket of furze, blackthorn, and bramble that grew there. Standing on the edge of the bank, we could follow the movements of the dogs by the snow which fell here and there from the bushes. Presently a woodcock rose silently a few yards in front of them on the far side, and fell to the shot, dropping behind a thorn-bush on the opposite bank. Shortly after, another got up but was missed, and then for a time there was a lull in the sport. Not that the excitement flagged, for the spaniels were giving tongue, and as they drew near the zigzagging bank on which we stood a rabbit bolted on our right; then, strange to say, a fox made off, stealing away with that lissom movement that only a wild creature is endowed with, his ruddy coat showing finely against the white background. Near the farther end of the stennack three teal were flushed. They were up and away in no time, affording a pretty right and left. Two dropped in the thicket, and it was some time before we succeeded in finding them. It may seem hard to understand that the stennack was a

haunt for wildfowl, but so it was. There was no pool of water there, no spring, as far as I could see; and a small cave at the foot of the high bank was dry, for, boylike, I peeped in over the drift that half-filled its mouth.

Leaving the field, we made for Trevean farmhouse. The snow in the unfrequented lane that we followed was unmarked by any footprint except the track of a hare. Soon we could smell the reek of burning furze, and as we came in sight of the high stone chimney, we heard the mooing of the cattle that had been driven in from the wild moors around. Two colts, with rugged coats and steaming nostrils, whose heads projected over the half-door of the stable, welcomed us with a neigh, as we crossed the rickyard and entered the house. A fire blazed on the hearth; but of the interior I can recall clearly but one object, an old woman wearing a small red shawl, seated in a high-backed chair at the end of the table, with a big book open before her. It was the indescribable calm on her face that I shall never forget. That is what I see first as the scene passes before my eyes, then the muslin cap she wore, and last, though its hue was so bright, her red turnover. A sheep-dog was stretched at full length on the stone floor, his nose, that lay between his tan-

coloured paws, nearly touching the little wooden footstool on which the aged woman's feet rested ; but this part of the picture is faded. My friend chatted with her so long about some great frost of years before that I thought he must have forgotten all about the woodcock. At length we left the farm kitchen and set out for the wild waste-land, the farmer going with us. The good sport we subsequently met with in Billy Hal's moor tempts me to tell the reader at once what happened there, but I will first touch briefly on the most striking incidents in the wide round we took over the country on the hither side of it.

Scarcely a croft but held its woodcock : hardly a runnel from which a snipe did not rise. In the bottom under Penhale fox-brake, a woodcock rose out of some brambles growing inside the ruined walls of a roofless cottage, and a little further down, where a leat runs into the New Bridge stream—that looked amid the snow like a black ribbon lying on a bed of goose-down—a mallard was shot, and a startled heron was allowed to flap itself away unmolested. Shortly after this, the sun for a brief space broke through the clouds and turned the dull white scene into a glittering fairyland. Near Boswortha Cairn—oh, how piercing was the

icy wind there—both barrels were discharged at a passing flock of golden plover, and on the far side of the rocks the farmer, humouring my curiosity, led me to see a set of badgers' earths. Three of the holes were blocked, and not a track was to be seen in front of the one that remained open. As we hurried to rejoin our little party, the farmer dropped up to his ears in a pit, his black beard lying flat on the snow. His hearty laugh rang out; but my friend, who was some thirty yards below us, did not turn his head—in fact, did not, as he afterwards said, hear any sound. I mention this to show how strong the wind was, though another fact probably contributed to the result—my friend and his old henchman were approaching Billy Hal's moor.

Waste land it is, as its name indicates, but in luxuriance of growth it is an oasis amidst the barren hills that screen it from unkind winds. In the spring, its bushes are the first of that wild and unprofitable countryside to spread a wealth of golden blossom; in the autumn, the blackberry-picker crowns her basket with big purple berries from the bushes beside the rushy brook there. Later, when the sloes have shrivelled on the blackthorns and the coralline hips of the dog-rose adorn the leafless briers, the farm-boy, seeking strayed cattle,

flushes the first woodcock of the season and forthwith sets a springe or two on the boggy margin of the runnel under the thicket of black withes. From then until February this moor holds more than its share of the longbills, and when woodcock are plentiful in other coverts, in Billy Hal's moor, to use the country folks' term, they are "daggin." In the middle rises a knoll, whence the eye may descry the rude boundaries that enclose its, perhaps, four customary acres.

My friend was pushing aside the snow-laden furze towards this vantage-ground, and I followed in his wake. When he had gained it, he raised the hammers of the gun, and then lifted his hand as a signal to the farmer to let loose the dogs. We knew there were at least three woodcock in the moor, for we had seen them drop there. Before you could count ten, a woodcock rose with a great flaping noise. Bang! went the gun as the bird twisted above the withes. Bang!—down it dropped on the snow a good forty yards away, between the moor and a clump of gloomy pines for which it seemed to be making. As I ran round to fetch it I heard "mark cock" twice in succession, but no report followed, and shortly after, "mark cock" from the farmer, with the discharge of both barrels. The

going was very rough, but at length I reached the brown bird lying in the snow beside the brook. What a beauty it was! To this day I cannot handle a woodcock without admiring its rich plumage, nor for that matter, though I have taken hundreds, take a trout off a hook without wondering at its lovely colouring.

It need scarcely be said that the rest of the moor was carefully beaten, but how many woodcock were flushed I cannot remember, nor do I regret it, for I fear the number might savour of exaggeration. Only five were added to the bag. One shot was a very long one, and the bird fell in the upper corner of the moor, near the ruins of Billy Hal's cottage.

How long it was since Hal squatted on the land and hatched a title, I have not been able to trace, nor the manner of his death, nor even where he lies buried. The country-people venerate his memory, partly because of his great skill in hiding smuggled goods and outwitting the king's officers, partly because of his markmanship with his blunderbuss. Some crofters aver they have heard from their fathers that there was a mystery about his end, and that Hal was buried at dead of night in his own land. However that may be, there he has at times

been seen on clear nights in winter, moving noiselessly about amongst the furze with a short heavy gun, or sitting on the stones of his ruined hearth. It is a great pity that the mantle of the famous ghost-layer, Parson Polkinghorne, has not descended to any of his successors. We have it on the best authority that his exorcising formula, which began with the words "Nommy, Dommy" (in nomine Domini), never failed to lay the poor troubled spirits of those less sceptical days.

The moor having been shot over, we made our way to the house. It was now nearly three o'clock, and I felt tired, though not too tired to eat. The farmer's daughter had laid our luncheon in the seldom-used parlour. There were sandwiches, mince-pies, a basin of clotted cream, some whortleberry jam, and a plate of sturmer pippins. These last were grown in my friend's garden on espaliers, and he could generally produce one or two even when the next year's fruit reddened the quarrenden-tree in the corner by the bee-skip. We stayed but a short time, as I thought, over our lunch, for we needed daylight to find our way down the bottoms, and snow had begun to fall again. From between the half-drawn curtains, where an ostrich egg hung, I had seen the big flakes. So bidding adieu to the dear

old lady, we made our way down the hill, and at length reached the clump of firs in the bottoms, where my friend stayed to light his pipe. I should not have mentioned so trifling an incident, had it not been that he used the tinder-box for the purpose. This was his almost invariable custom, except in summer: then he preferred a burning-glass, especially when deep-sea fishing. With a twinkle in his grey eyes the farmer remarked, "Like Mr George, edna?" and shortly after, at a spot where, as the curve of the drift showed, was a gap, he left us and was soon lost to sight in the blinding snow. We had rather less than a mile to go before striking a road, but our progress was poor, owing partly to the drifts, partly to the rough ground that lay under the even surface of the snow. A candle was burning in a window of Hendra farmhouse as we passed the lower pond, and when we came in sight of Boswednan lane we saw the lights—the welcome lights—of a carriage that was awaiting us at the foot of the hill. Of the drive home I know nothing, as I slept soundly the whole way.

Thus ended a day's sport which lives in my memory when days since enjoyed on grouse-moors

and by woodland coverts have been well-nigh forgotten, big bags notwithstanding.

Since penning these lines, I have turned to my friend's diary. These are his brief entries for the two days :—

"25th December.—Heavy fall of snow. Sharp frost. Bunches of duck and geese in the bay. Seine shot at Mullion. Bonfire on Poldhu Cliff. Eleven loads of fish up by five o'clock next morning, when I left Newlyn cellar."

"26th December.—At Trewern, Trevean, Penhale, Boswortha Cairn, Billy Hal's moor, with Jack. 9 woodcock ; 3 brace snipe, 2½ golden plover, 1 of teal ; 1 big snipe, 1 mallard, 1 bittern. Wind keen as a razor on Boswortha Cairn, very lew in Billy Hal's moor, which was full of 'cock.'"

The old "Joe Manton," which I have taken out of its case, is standing against my study-table, and a beautiful weapon it is, albeit the barrels are a trifle thin. Many days' use have worn them so ; but as far as I have been able to look back through the interesting diary there is only one entry with a bigger bag, and that was in the very winter when the scream of the iron horse silenced the coach-horn, and gave such a shock to Penwith's customs. If you ask of what year I have been writing, I will tell

you in our West-country way—by naming an unusual event—that it was the year when a pilchard seine was shot on Christmas Day, and tucked in a snowstorm under the cliffs, on which a beacon, to spread the glad tidings, was lighted on a spot whence wireless messages are now transmitted across the seas.

## CHAPTER XVI

### BASS FISHING AT THE LAND'S END

Two fishermen strained at the creaking oars, and held the boat in the tide-race close under the Longships lighthouse, whilst I grasped the taut line, at the end of which a sand-eel was spinning. We could see the bass in their play break the surface some twenty yards astern, and every instant I expected that the bait would be seized. What sport those big fish would have given in the strong current! But no, the bass refused to bite at the silvery lure spinning under their very nose. We changed the bait—tried pilchard, squid, ray's liver, spider-crab; we varied the length of the line, the weight of the lead; we trailed the bait along the edge of the school; in short, we did all we knew. It was of no use. "They're not on the feed, sir," said old Matthey, after two hours of this exasperating work. There was no gainsaying this palpable

SENNEN COVE.

[*Face page* 206.

truth, but in my own mind I set the fact down to piscine cussedness. I had come to Sennen for my holidays in order to try and kill a big bass, and it seemed as if the bad luck that had dogged me wherever I had gone in quest of this fish, pursued me still. In West-country phrase, I appeared to be ill-wished. It was on the top of the spring, and we had fished with apparently every condition in our favour except the clearness of the water. "What's wanted," said Matthey's mate as we approached the wooden slip, "is a bit of a tumble, to stir the bottom and thicken the water."

As scarcely a breath of wind was blowing, and the sky looked like brass, the prospect of rough weather and clouded water seemed very remote. Yet it turned out not to be so. Well may the fishermen of Sennen Cove, who no longer have the guardian spirit their forefathers had, to warn them, watch the sky for premonitory token of storm.

About sundown, on Tuesday the 14th August, a fortnight or so after the tantalising experience related above, a weather-dog was seen near the horizon, which made the older fishermen shake their heads and caused them to be abroad before dawn. Seeing that the glass had fallen to storm-level and that the seabirds with wild cries were making for

the southern cliffs, the thirteen boats were brought in from their moorings and everything made snug just in time before the sea became too rough for any craft in the cove to venture out, except the life-boat. At daybreak on the Thursday the sands were littered with seaweed; in places the foam lay in drifts like snow, and for miles inland the farmers must have heard, in the lulls of the storm, the waves thundering against the cliffs. It was not until the morning of Saturday that fishing was possible, even from the shore, and then only at some risk, because of that treacherous run in the water which from time to time costs the life of a rock-fisher. I had little hope of success, for the sea was now as thick as barm, yet I caught a grey mullet of five pounds, and lost another owing to the hook tearing its hold. After this, being wet through with the spray, I made tracks for my cottage on the brow of the cliff.

By Monday the sea had moderated enough to allow us to get Matthey's boat afloat, and we ventured out to our old fishing-ground near the Longships and dropped the killick overboard. The water was in perfect order, and one might compare it to a river clearing after a spate. What sport! I kept catching pollack and bream until I was tired

of pulling them in; but, alas! the bass had shifted their quarters, and although we visited their usual haunts we failed to meet with them. The glass continuing to rise, we ventured further along the coast, and spent the rest of the week fishing the three miles of water between the Land's End and Porthgwarra. Excellent whiffing-ground this is well known to be, and so it proved; but unfortunately the week's sport was marred by a disaster for which I was entirely to blame. It was on the morning of Thursday, just after the steamer the *Lady of the Isles* had passed on her way to Scilly. Up till then we had had good sport with pollack, five of these beautiful bronze-coloured fish lying in the basket on the bottom-boards. Shortly after, when near the Rundle Stone, I lost a heavy fish, and with it the spinning-flight, through its boring down and getting entangled in the weeds, as big pollack are wont to do. Of course, I should have held on at any cost and not given an inch of line; and this I determined to do with the next fish that should lay hold of the new eel-tail that was soon trailing in the wake of the boat. I was exchanging a few words with old Matthey, who was holding the sheet—we were sailing to and fro the great tidal stream—when I got into a very heavy fish, to which

I held on like grim death. In less time than it takes to tell, the line snapped and a bass which had leapt clear of the water twenty yards astern fell back like a bar of silver into the trough of a wave and disappeared. What word or words escaped me on witnessing the fish—it was uncommonly like a salmon—with the broken trace hanging from its open jaws, I do not remember. At such mortifying moments the tongue is very apt to prove an unruly member, yet old Matthey never opened his mouth. He was like one struck dumb, but his face was as long as a fiddle, and the gaff dropped from his fingers as though it burned them.

With the loss of that fish I really began to despair, and it would have been almost pardonable if I had taken a trip to Camborne to consult the wise man there about removing the spell which, all joking apart, I began to fear hung over me. The following week my chances of success were reduced to a minimum, for the wind veered round, the water close in shore became as smooth as it ever is at the Land's End, and in a few days was as clear as crystal. The resourceful Matthey recommended me, under these almost hopeless conditions, to fish from the small rocky headland that separates the Sennen from the Gwenvor sands.

PORTHGWARRA.

[*Face page* 210.

"The hotter et es the closer in they comes, and et's the biggest baas as hugs the shore."

> "When the corn is in the shock,
> The fish is on the rock."

I suggested, quoting the Cornish proverb.

He smiled, and replied, "Well, et's meant for pelchurs, but et's true enuf for salmin baas."

Somewhat cheered by the old fellow's words, I set out after an early lunch for Roarer Point, as it is called, taking my fishing-tackle with me. The going was heavy, for the sand, beloved of the launce, is loose; moreover the sun beat down mercilessly; but there was some compensation in the scene.

I do not believe the man lives who could have been blind to the beauty of that sea. In an old Eastern poem a Persian is represented as beholding from the desert's edge a boundless plain of turquoise. The Atlantic on which I looked might have been such a plain, except for the way it heaved; but it was on the breaking wave that the eye dwelt, and found relief from the glare of the beach. How deliciously cool the ever-rising, ever-breaking walls of translucent water looked in contrast with the glowing sands over which the air

shimmered and quivered. Overhead a gull floated lazily, its snowy plumage showing finely against the blue vault; and just after I crossed the little stream that trickles down from Vellandreath, a butterfly—I believe it was a red admiral—greatly daring, flitted seaward, and passed out of my sight.

At last I reached the little headland, scrambled over the burning rocks, and gained its extreme point. The water below me was some ten or twelve feet deep, and being outside the line of the breakers, its surface, except when a breath of wind caught it, was without a ripple, and the eye could search every foot of the bottom near the rocks, and for some distance beyond. When I had baited the hook, I threw the line into the water towards the Gwenvor sands, where I could see the approach of any bass that might be coasting towards Sennen Cove, and it might be, watch it swallow the lure, for—

> "The pleasant'st angling, is to see the fish
> Cut with his golden oars the silver stream,
> And greedily devour the treacherous bait."

Besides the hand-line I had a rod with me, and on this I had rigged a spinning-flight and launce, intending, when the tide rose about a foot higher, to make a few casts from the point.

A seaweed, favourite food of the shy mullet, grew on two big boulders that lay half-buried in the white sand in the water below me. Though semi-transparent it was clearly visible when the rippled surface smoothed. Presently a small crab, as if fearful of being seen, scuttled across the sandy strait between the rocks where rested my tempting bait of ray's liver.

My attention was chiefly occupied watching the bait and the water between it and the shore on which white-crested waves were breaking; but now and then I looked into a pool at my side. Bright-coloured anemones starred its sides, delicatest seaweeds spread their fronds in the limpid water, and a small fish called a pulcronack rested motionless between two rosy lichen-like patches, apparently intent on something, or as if it were listening for the steps of the incoming tide.

A buzzing noise drew my eyes for a moment to a green-backed fly that had discovered and settled on the silvery eel, and when I looked at the sea again two dark objects were coming towards me slowly, as they followed the line of the broken water in which they were now and again lost to sight. Owing to the glare I could not at first make the fish out distinctly, though they were swimming over

the whitest of sands; but when they came within a rod's length of the bait, I saw what monsters they were, and instinctively uncoiled some slack line from the wooden frame on which it was wound. The bass, for such they were, were swimming about midway between the surface and the bait, and when a few yards from the luscious morsel, their heads went down, and the next instant only inches separated them from the liver. What exactly happened at this critical moment is uncertain, owing to a slight ripple that disturbed the surface. I could see their blurred dark forms near the rocks, and a slight twitching shook the line, which I held loosely between my nervous fingers for fear of alarming them. *Tout vient*, etc., I thought, expecting to have the line wrenched through my hands, both of which were ready to grip it as the fish should rush seawards. However, it was not destined that I should land a bass that afternoon, for presently the stately fish moved off in the direction of the point, the bigger one in front; and a more dignified procession of two a chagrined spectator never beheld. I suppose their suspicion had been aroused, though there was nothing to suggest it, so deliberate were their movements. This gave me time to grasp my rod and swing the

sand-eel for a cast before the leading fish showed beyond a conical rock that momentarily hid him. Crouching, lest he should catch sight of me, I managed to drop the bait in front of and a little beyond him, and, allowing it to sink, drew it rapidly through the water so that it passed within a foot of his nose. It would be difficult to imagine anything more irresistible for a fish than that silvery bait, the spin of which, though I ought not to say so, might have satisfied a Thames trout! Did the bass make a rush at it? No, it simply swerved a little, and swam away in the most leisurely fashion, the smaller fish following majestically in its wake. They kept their distance as truly as two torpedo boats, and moved as if directed by a single mind.

Let those who think that all sea-fish are easily caught, try their skill and their patience at the Land's End. I venture to say that, the grey mullet and the Thames trout excepted, no fish is more difficult to capture in clear water than the bass, and that the salmon is a fool to it. To recapitulate my attempts: I had failed in the strong tidal current near the Longships and the Cowloe rocks; I had hooked and lost a monster in the Vrose off Tol-Pedn-Penwith; and my experience when fishing from Roarer Point would have tried

the patience of that famous rock fisherman, St Levan himself.

I was not, however, at the end of my resources, for I could improve on the fineness of my tackle. Hitherto I had used single salmon-gut. I now resolved, though not without serious misgiving, to substitute a sea-trout cast, and, as the next best time to the grey of early dawn—an hour which has no great charm for me — to fish under cover of night.

The spot I chose was near where the small stream from Vellandreath runs over the beach, in which, except after heavy rains, it loses itself just before reaching high-water mark. I was there an hour before sundown. My hook baited with cuttle-fish lay a yard or two beyond the broken water. As the tide rose, I moved up the beach and pulled the bait a little nearer in. There was no sign of any fish, but I was hopeful of success when the golden track across the ocean should disappear and the light become sombre. At length the sun dipped below the horizon, the fires it had awakened in the windows of the cottages died away, and the curve of sand lost its warm colouring. With the paling in the west, first the evening star and then the others appeared, the fishing-village twinkled with glow-

worm lights, and the Longships and the Seven Stones' lightship exchanged their nightly greetings across the submerged land of Lyonnesse. When the bells of Sennen ceased ringing, there was scarcely any sound save the murmur of the waves, which broke in lines of phosphorescence on the long strand. Now and then I pulled in my line to see that the bait was free from seaweed; at times I followed a light out at sea, where some steamer moved in the darkness. Thus the hours passed; and at eleven o'clock, despairing of success, I was on the point of going to my lodging. It wanted yet half an hour to high water, however, and I resolved to stay on.

At irksome times like this one's thoughts are apt to stray, and a straw may give them direction. What may have suggested the train of thought, unless it was the tinkle of the rivulet beside me, I cannot say, but my mind reverted to the part the sands of Whitsand Bay have played in history. Here, three centuries ago, the Spaniard landed and burnt the mill at Vellandreath; here landed Perkin Warbeck, on his ill-starred expedition; here Stephen; here John, on his return from Ireland; here Athelstan; here, if tradition be true, those heathen hordes whom King Arthur and his knights overthrew on

Vellandrucher moor; here were drawn up the galleys. . . .

My historical reverie was interrupted by a slight tug at the line held loosely in my hand, a tug followed by the drawing of the slack through my fingers. A bass—it is his way—was running out to sea with the bait in his mouth. At last! I had jumped to my feet on feeling the fish, and when the loose line was used up, I suddenly raised the point of the rod—a sixteen-foot salmon-rod—and drove the hook home. What a rush the fish made! I put on every ounce of strain I dared, considering the fineness of the cast, but it seemed to have little or no effect on the fish, which kept going seawards. I could tell its whereabouts during the first part of the rush by the jet of phosphorescent water that spurted from the line, but now I could see nothing except the dark expanse with its silvery fringe. If the tackle held, I knew the bass could count on nothing in its favour; for the moorings of the boat and of the storepots were far outside the limit of my hundred yards of line, and there was no wreckage now, the fishermen having cleared it away for the sake of the mullet and pilchard seines. To husband the line left on the reel, I advanced as far as I dared into the water, my feet sinking deep in the loose sand.

I was rather at a loss to know how to act for the best; whether to continue the steady strain to the last, or give the fish the butt before the line was run out. To stand there and be smashed would be ignominious; so, come what might, I determined to take the offensive. Grasping the greenheart and the line in both hands, I brought the point of the rod back over my shoulder slowly, to avoid a jerk, putting on all the strain I could. Either the fish must yield or the tackle break. There was a violent struggle, in which the top joint played an important part, and then suddenly the tension relaxed, and I feared—in fact, had little doubt—that the gut had snapped, or possibly the hook torn away. Winding up as quickly as possible, I had recovered some twenty yards when, to my joy, the reel screamed again. A second time I applied the butt, and then kept working the fish in. Now he would swim to my left, now to the right, but I could not see the wave which I feel sure he was raising. With much difficulty, for he fought all the way, I brought him to within a few yards of the breakers. How he struggled to maintain his ground there! evidently regarding the broken water as a zone of the greatest danger. After a time I thought I might venture to haul him in. But no, he would not consent to that.

Of his own free will he had for many summers sought the shallows, even foraged amongst the breakers; but there was a good reason why he should shun them now. Once I had him just beyond the faintly gleaming arch of a wave, though I could not distinguish the fish, but only the place where he was struggling inside rings of incandescent silver. At last his strength was spent, and I succeeded in dragging him into the grip of a wave which tumbled him half-way up the shelving beach. With a great effort I extricated my legs from the quicksand, and throwing my rod aside, rushed at the fish as the backwash carried him down. I got a hold of him, but lost it, the prickly dorsal fin wounding my hand badly; then the next wave, which nearly swept me off my feet—in my desperation I had followed the fish—washed him in, and though half-blinded by the spray, I succeeded in rolling him on to the dry sand.

I have killed many bass since, but none so heavy—he weighed fifteen pounds four ounces—none which made such a gallant fight. It is true that they were landed under more cheerful conditions, for it must be owned that that night's fishing on the edge of the Atlantic was weird and lonely.

A Haunt of the Razor-Bill.

[*Face page* 220.

## CHAPTER XVII

### NED'S TALE OF THE BIRDS

It was within a stone's throw of the sea at Lamorna, that I sat and listened to Ned's "Tale of the Birds."

We had been fishing the trout-stream that empties itself into the cove, and were resting on the boulders near the bridge before turning homewards. Ned is a good all-round sportsman, but his knowledge of birds is remarkable, and the reason is not far to seek. His father was a taxidermist who was regarded as an authority on British birds by Rodd and by Gould. For some twenty years Ned assisted him in his work; but his delight was, and is, to wander over the country in search of sport and specimens. To this is, perhaps, chiefly due the knowledge he possesses of the avifauna of Cornwall.

To understand the birds of Cornwall, said he, you must know that, besides those always with us, and the migrants that reach us regularly in the spring

and autumn, many kinds of wild-fowl visit us in hard winters and remain whilst the frost lasts. This corner of England, owing chiefly to the warm sea about it, is milder than any other except the Scilly Isles, and when birds are frozen out elsewhere, they can pick up a living here. A good feeding-ground is the Land's End district—what with its beaches, its boggy ground and pools on the moors, and above all the overgrown, marshy valleys, which mostly run north and south, and are sheltered from the bitter east winds. Birds of gay plumage have been shot in these bottoms which you would expect to meet with only in a tropical forest—such as the hoopoe, the waxwing, the roller, the bee-eater, and the golden oriole. Of the four hundred birds comprised in the avifauna of the British Isles two hundred and ninety have been observed in Cornwall, so you see that our bird-life is as rich as the fish-life in the sea about the promontory, or the flora that makes the face of the country so beautiful.

Now it's out of the question my attempting to talk about nearly three hundred different kinds of birds, so I'll pick out a few things that may interest you. Look! that's a starling on the cottage chimney, and I'll begin with him. A few years ago you might search West Cornwall over without seeing

one—I mean in the month of August, though they came in tens of thousands in the winter. I've seen the osier beds along the Eastern Green and the reeds at Marazion Marsh black with them ; and when I was a boy I used to fire at passing flocks with a bow and arrow, as with a great whirr of wings they skimmed over the Well field on their way to roost. I believe that starlings have regular lines of flight, as they seldom failed to pass over that field about sundown. To come to the point, no sooner was winter over than they all went up-along ; but now some remain all the year round, and breed. The cause is to be found, I believe, in the enormous increase of this bird.

Then the daws—I mean the jackdaws—are ever so much more numerous than they used to be. In my young days they were scarce, and I used to be let down over the cliffs with a rope round me, to get their eggs. Now you can see them everywhere, about the old mine-ruins, about the farmhouses, and even about the villages.

The green woodpecker is also more plentiful than it used to be. Considering how bare of trees the country is, this is perhaps more surprising than the increase of the starling or the daw. It is true that some new plantations, such as those at Tregavara and

Bijowans, are growing up, and who can say but that in time we shall have jays and nightingales, and perhaps squirrels?

The country-people say that the "tinner," that is the "dishwasher" or water-wagtail, is scarcer than it was before the blizzard, which must have caused the death of tens of thousands of birds. They call it the tinner, because it builds its nest in the mouth of the old mine-shafts.

Now I'll tell you about the last Cornish choughs I ever saw alive. It was away on the Rinsey Cliffs, a lone place between Pra Sands and Porthleven; and of course I wanted to get them. I had a gun with me—as indeed I always had, for there was no close season in those days. The birds were on a splat of fine turf near the edge of the cliff, and within gun-shot of an old engine-house that lay beyond them. There was no chance of my getting near enough to these birds—shy as hawks through persecution—not even by crawling; for the surface was nearly as smooth as a bowling-green, with only a patch of vernal squill here and there. Lying in a dip of the ground, and all hidden up to my eyes, I could see every movement of the two birds—a cock and a hen they were—and more, I could hear every note they uttered. "Daw, daw," they kept calling, a kind of bleat, a

pitiful little cry I should call it; and yet I wanted to kill them both. Instead of getting closer to me, as I hoped, they were, if anything, moving nearer to the engine-house. Then, thinks I, why not get round and come at them from behind the building. This I set out to do, making a long circuit, and at last the ruin lay between me and them. I reached it without having seen the birds fly away, though I could no longer hear them calling. All of a tremble with excitement, and with the gun at full cock, I crept through a hole in the wall, made my way round the edge of the shaft, and peeped through a chink in the wall opposite. No choughs could I see. They were gone; and I was disappointed, sir, I can tell ee. I went to the edge of the cliff, and looked down. Not a bird was to be seen; nothing but a few shags on the rocks in the white water. As I said, I never saw a chough alive again. They were, I believe, the last of their race. It's a pity they're extinct. Handsome birds I call them, with their black glossy plumage and vermilion bill and legs. I can hear that "daw, daw" now as I sit here; plaintive it was for a love-note.

I forgot to say that the magpie is more common than it used to be, though the farm boys "strub" every nest they can find. Interesting birds I call

them, and a feature of the country, a homely feature, like the pigeons I saw about the Abbey up in London, only wilder.

Yes, a magpie on a wind-clipt thorn bush, a yellow-hammer on a furze spray, gulls behind a ploughshare, a cormorant on a rock in the green water, and jackdaws about a broken mine-stack, are pictures downright Cornish; and they are always with us.

Dear me, how everything comes back when you begin to talk.

If anything would make me laugh again, it would be what I once saw at Nancothan. I was looking through a window of the farmhouse into the orchard. Perhaps it was the peculiar behaviour of a magpie that attracted my attention. There he was with his neck drawn out and head thrown back, making tremendous thrusts with his beak at something on the ground. After lunging two or three times, he turned his head on one side and looked at whatever lay there, first with one eye, then turning his head, with the other. It's a comical sight is a magpie looking with one eye at anything. Well then, he began to dig, dig again, and after a final critical examination with each eye, flew up into an apple-tree. I ran out to see what he had been

THE HOME OF THE CORMORANT.

[*Face page 226.*

pecking at so vigorously. What do you think I found? why, a china nest-egg! I see that it amuses you, sir, as it used to amuse me. It's the funniest thing in bird-life I ever saw.

There's more tragedy than comedy however about bird-life. Many young birds are stolen from the nests, to say nothing of finches, warblers, linnets, and chats killed by hawks. Of course, all this is part of the plan of nature, though to my thinking there's a deal of cruelty in it. What crueller thing can you imagine than a falcon cutting down a hern winging home, say to Trevethoe Park, where they breed, with food for its young? I never saw this; but one day, when lying up in Bosigran Cliffs watching for seals, I saw a fight between a peregrine and a raven, in which the raven got the worst of it. The falcon wanted the whole cliff to itself, and in the end he had his way, for the ravens forsook their nest.

A bird with a royal mien is a peregrine falcon, an ornament to the wild cliffs where he breeds. I have seen him soar till he looked like a speck in the blue, but I have never seen him stoop.

Now and again I've had glimpses of what is most beautiful in our bird-life—say of a kingfisher flying low over pools left by the ebb, when the sun catches

its breast and back feathers ; or what I once saw, and only once, a hern in full breeding plumage standing still as a statue in the shallows of a sparkling pool. I remember how lovely he looked. It was on the moor above Lanyon Quoit, when the early furze was in bloom ; and both the hern and myself were after the trout.

For gulls, you won't find a better place than Newlyn harbour. I have shot the great black-back there, and the little gull, a bird no bigger than a turtle-dove ; and from the pier-head I shot a "Bonaparte" gull, a bird that breeds in the Great Salt Lakes of America. You may ask if it came from there. I do not know, but I believe it did. Governor Augustus Smith of Scilly once brought my father an Esquimaux curlew. Where did that little stranger come from, what frozen seas lit by "Northern lights" had he flown over?

I say, there are wonderful things in bird-life, especially in their migratory movements. Take the red-breasted flycatcher that once reached here from the far East, or the snow-bunting whose home is within the Arctic circle, and probably at the Pole itself. But no, you will realise better if I take a bird you are familiar with. Consider the willow-wren or the golden-crest. One would say

that either of them is incapable of long flights. Yet these little creatures, whose weight you can hardly feel in your hand, cross hundreds of miles of sea without putting their foot down, except, it may be, on a passing ship's rigging. It's not only the distance covered that's so astonishing; what guides them in their long journey under the stars? Man navigates the ocean with the help of a compass, but how do the myriads of migrating birds find their way? I've puzzled my head many times to solve the problem, but I admit I'm beaten; unless they possess a sense of direction such as cats and dogs undoubtedly have, and which even the savage in the pathless forest is said to have developed.

The 8th of May and the 11th of October or thereabouts are the times of arrival in West Cornwall, and many's the time I've watched the sun rise over Mount's Bay on those days. What pictures I've seen there! The east afire, the west aglow with rosy light, beyond the belt of furrowy sand the blushing sea, and on the edge of it the little strangers wading and feeding. The dates of their departure are just as definite; and as the time for leaving our shores draws near, the birds gather at certain rendezvous and display great uneasiness. I have heard my father say, "The warblers will be off soon, Ned." He used to

feed the birds in our aviary over the porch as regular as clockwork every morning, and he would notice how restless they were, even throwing themselves against the bars of the cage whilst instinct stirred them.

I don't believe any man ever understood birds better than my father ; he was that observant, and could imitate their cries so exactly, all but talk with them, in fact. Mr Gould, when he visited Cornwall, always came to see him, and used to hang on his words, so to speak ; and that was no mean compliment. But there, sir, you'll think me prejudiced.

Talking of my father brings to mind an incident I will tell you. My father was very fond of wandering about Morvah and Zennor, when he could spare the time. You know what a lot of waste land there is in those parishes. Scattered over the downs there are some lonely pools frequented by birds, and in one of them I shot the only phalarope I ever saw alive. Well, my father was stealthily approaching rather a big pool when, to his annoyance, he saw a boy driving away some cattle that had been drinking there. Luckily he did not pass it by, for there on the bank, away from where the bullocks had been drinking, was a little bird that until then had never been observed in England. It was a buff-

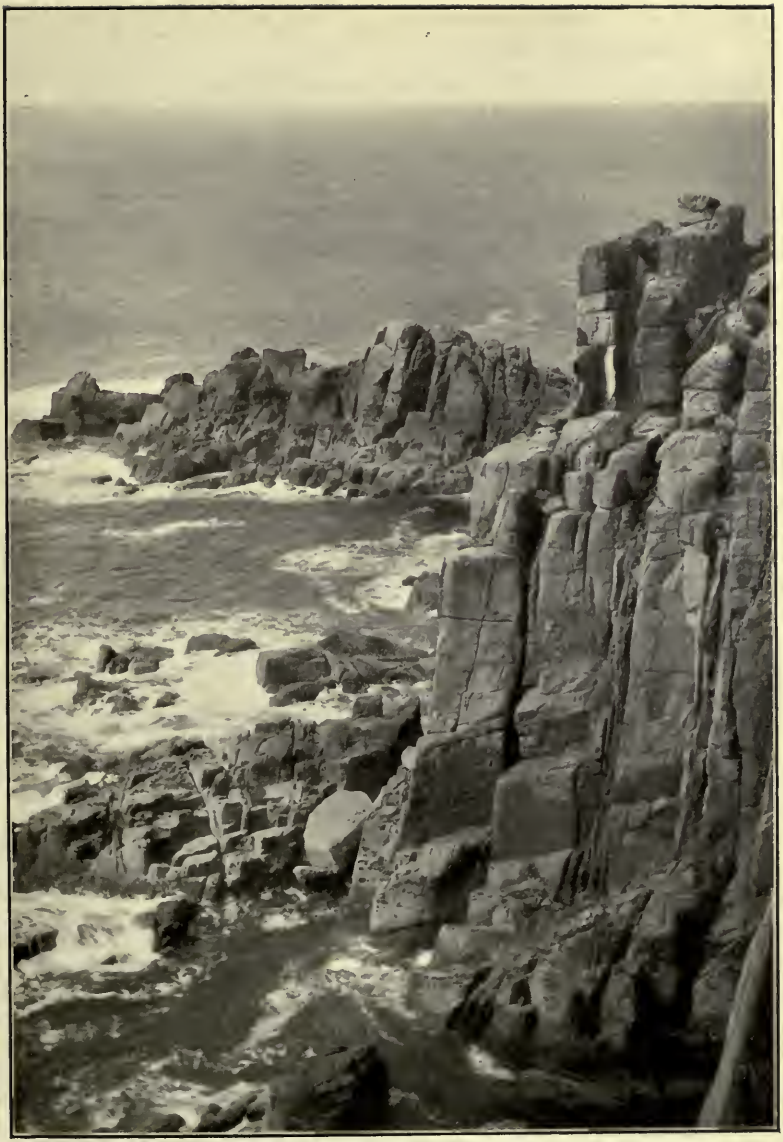
breasted sandpiper, and I could tell by his face when he returned home that he had shot something very rare. Whilst I was examining the bird by the lamplight, my father took up the *Western Morning News;* and when I asked him where I should put the bird for the night, he made no answer. Tired as I knew he was, I thought this strange, because he was such a a genial man. The bad news he had seen in the paper had upset him ; that was it. The French had had lost a great battle, I think it was called Sedan. My father was very fond of the French. After Colenso, and in the same week too with Magersfontein and Stromberg, I thought of this incident, and I understood what my father had felt. Around our fires the men were so quiet that the camp might have been asleep. It would seem that such times are for thinking, not for question and answer. Forgive me, sir, for getting so down in the dumps.

My happiest days after birds were spent on the Eastern Green and around Marazion Marsh. I have always been fond of small wading birds, such as sanderlings, dunlins, stint, and turnstones. Shy and wild they are, and elegant they look, running about on the edge of the tide, following the ebb or advancing before the flow. Days and days I've watched them and returned home without firing a

shot, but I've killed yellow-shank, dotterel, Kentish plover, and pygmy curlew there; and once I found, after a heavy gale, a stormy petrel washed up on the beach.

And now, perhaps I have said enough for you to understand why this little tongue of land, whose tip is the Land's End, has got such a hold upon me. On the greyest day the moors are not dismal to me, nor the shores melancholy. There's hardly a square mile out of the hundred that isn't full of associations. The cliffs, the wastes of furze and heather, the tangled bottoms, the open beaches and the little coves, are all rich in pleasant memories; and the whistle of the curlew, the croak of raven or hern, the scream of sea-fowl, the piping of small wading birds and the song of the sedge-warbler are to me the music of familiar voices. Rolling veldt, mountain range and river don't appeal to me like the downs, hills, and streams that I've got to know by heart.

"A treeless, barren waste" a man once called the Land's End district to my poor father, who preferred the scent of its furze to the perfume of roses and the bell-heather before hothouse flowers. Everything wild he liked, ay, loved; the sea-pinks, the golden samphire, the sea-holly, the ferns in



THE LAND'S END.

[*Face page* 232.

the zawns, the seaweed in the pools, the shells on the beach. And when he was unable to move out of the house—he lived to eighty-two—he used to sit up in the little bay-window, where he could see the sun set, and watch for my return, and then he'd ask what birds I'd seen, and about the flowers. The speedwell, the scarlet pimpernel, and the forget-me-not were especial favourites of his, and I'd always bring home one or the other in my fishing-basket. Touching it was to see him look at them.

If ever a man loved nature with his whole soul, my father did, but above everything he loved the birds.

But come! we must be moving. I see the gulls are winging home.

# GLOSSARY

*Account*, a meeting of mine-adventurers.

*Bal*, a mine.
*Bra'* (brave), very, much.
*Brandis*, an iron tripod which stands amongst the embers of turf or furze for resting a crock or kettle on.

*Chucklehead*, a booby.
*Churchtown* (pronounced ch'town), a hamlet or village near a church; used also of a town, and even of a city, as "Lunnon ch'town."
*Cleeves*, ledges and clefts in the face of a cliff.
*Croust*, refreshment of cakes and cider in harvest time; refreshment generally.
*Crow*, a sty, a hovel.
*Custna*, couldst thou not?

*Daggin'*, very numerous, in clusters.

*Edna*, is it not?

*Flambustered*, excited, agitated.

*Fogau*, an inland cave.
*Fuggan*, a cake or pasty.

*Gurgoes*, the ruins of ancient fences found on waste land.

*Hepping* or *hipping stock*, a stand of three or four steps for more easily mounting a horse.
*High by day*, high day, broad daylight.

*Kingcrowner*, the name given to the purple emperor, peacock or admiral butterflies.

*Launce*, sand-eel.
*Leel*, little.

*Mazed*, greatly bewildered.
*Mizy-mazy*, confused.
*Mowhay*, rickyard.

*Niddick* or *nuddick*, nape of the neck.

*Pelchurs*, pilchards.
*Planchen*, a plank, a wood floor.

*Pore*, state of agitation.

*Pulcronack* a small gudgeon-like fish.

*Quilkan*, a frog.

*Radgell*, a pile of loose rocks.

*Riffle*, a break in a roof made by a strong wind carrying away slates or thatch.

*Spens*, a store cupboard frequently under the stairs.

*Stennack* (*stannum*, tin), an excavation made by the old miners.

*Strub*, to rob.

*Tedn*, 'tis not.

*Ticketing days*, the days on which the tin-ore is sold by ticket at Redruth.

*To be vexed as fire*, to be in a great passion.

*To think slight of*, to have a low opinion of.

*To tuck a seine*, to remove the fish with a tuck-net.

*Tubbal*, a farm implement for breaking up ground.

*Up-along*, may mean up the road or to some part of England outside Cornwall, *e.g.*, "He's gone up-along, and some do say, to Lunnon ch'town."

*Wheal*, a mine.

*Whinnard*, the redwing.

*Wisht*, like a person ill-wished; melancholy, dismal, sad.

*Wusta*, wilt thou?

*Zawn*, a cavern in a cliff.

---

*Dommage feasance*, mischief done.

*Male pardus*, wretched ones (poor miserable cubs?)

*Har and tue* (*har* = halloo), cry and kill.

*Gives the fico* (*figo*), does not care a fig.

PRINTED BY OLIVER AND BOYD, EDINBURGH

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW.

Series 9482

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 580 926 4